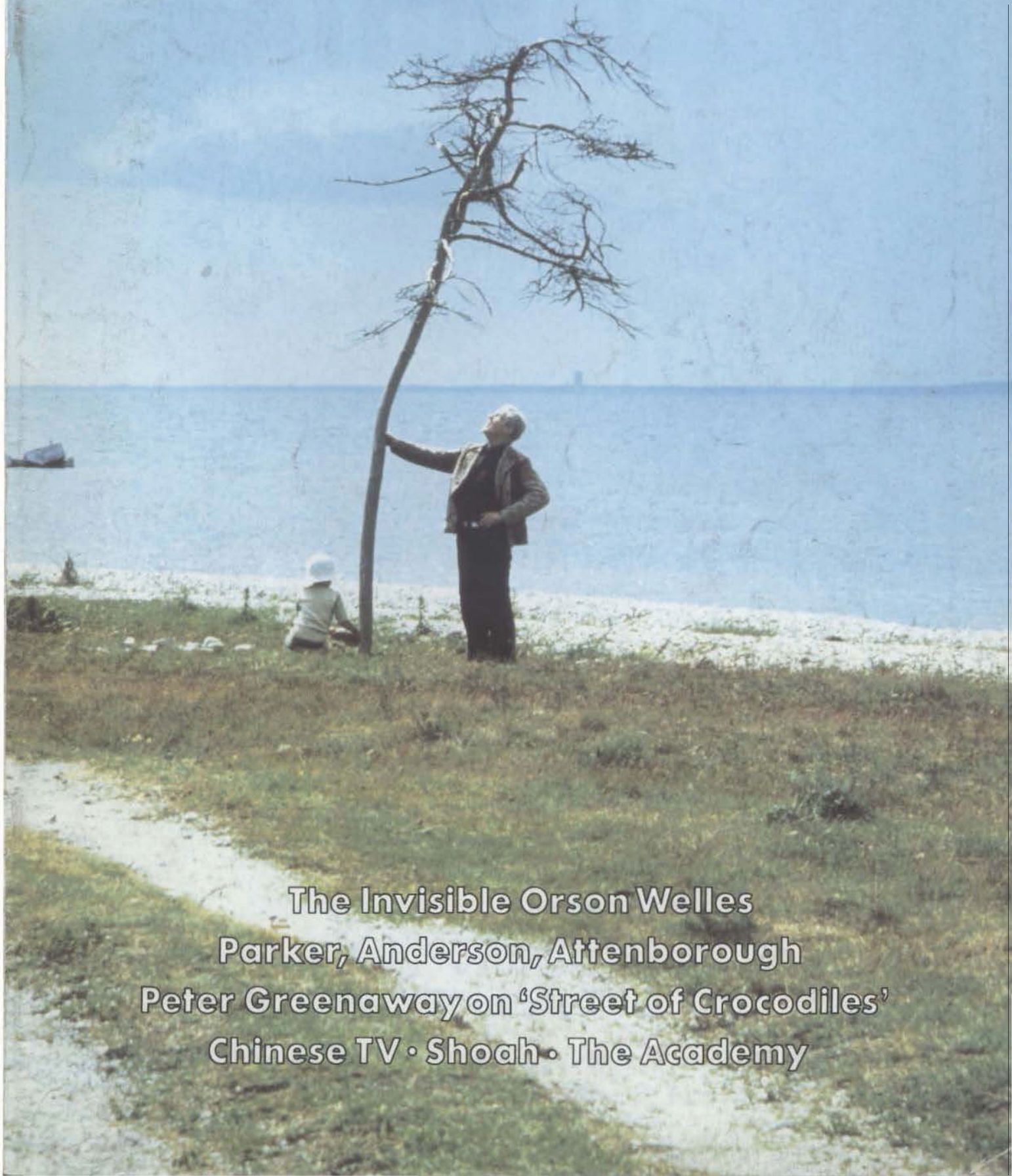


SIGHT & SOUND

INTERNATIONAL FILM QUARTERLY • SUMMER 1986 • £1.55 • \$3.50



The Invisible Orson Welles
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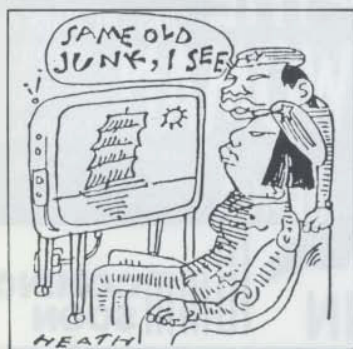
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On the cover:
 Andrei Tarkovsky's
 'The Sacrifice'.

In the Picture Colouring films/Spanish tv/Hong Kong/Cuba/Berlin/INA and propaganda. **147**

Parker, Anderson, Attenborough Penelope Houston on a Thames Television series with some contentious personal views. **152**

TV on TV Charles Barr assesses Channel 4's *Open the Box*, and compares it to Granada's series *Television*. **157**

Cannes 1986 Penelope Houston and Richard Roud file reports. **160**

The Invisible Orson Welles 'A first inventory' compiled by Jonathan Rosenbaum: just what did the Master leave us? **164**

India's Middle Cinema Derek Malcolm reports from the Hyderabad Filmotsav on the successors to India's 'Parallel Cinema.' **172**

Double Takes Peter Quince, a showman himself, on three showmanly enterprises: a Cromer beano, the smallest cinema in Britain, and a screening of *The Smallest Show on Earth*. **176**

A Year in Front of the Dianshi Simon Worrall on Chinese television: its news, its commercials, its drama of the eye and the sigh. **178**

Street of Crocodiles Peter Greenaway muses on the peregrinations of one of the Quay Brothers' animated figures. **182**

Academic Distinctions The end of an era: John Russell Taylor marks the passage of Oxford Street's Academy cinemas. **184**

Shoah John Pym reviews Claude Lanzmann's monumental documentary on the witnesses of the Holocaust. **187**

Polish Cinema 'The End of a Beginning', Tomasz Warchol on the period 1977-81, when film was 'the mirror, the conscience and the educator of Polish society'; and 'An Internal Exile?', Edward Rogerson on the post-1981 retreat into 'The dangerously seductive cultural traditions of metaphor and allegory'. **190**

'To Love Is to Suffer' In 1956 SIGHT AND SOUND introduced the Japanese director Heinosuke Gosho to British filmgoers; here Mark Le Fanu, following an NFT season, reassesses some of Gosho's late masterpieces. **198**

Born in Flames *Target:* Richard Combs reflects on Arthur Penn's route to a deceptive tale of espionage in the 80s. **204**

Film Reviews *Captive/After Hours/Vagabonde/L'Effrontée/Absolute Beginners.* **207**

Book Reviews *Sculpting in Time/John Boorman/Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan/Exporting Entertainment/Behind the Spanish Lens.* **213**

Letters **218**

On Now **220**

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Colour Box

New films for old

What colour was Rosebud? Was the decor of Rick's Café a moody mauve or a shade of blue? If you think these colours are a pigment of the imagination, you could be in for a rude awakening. Courtesy of an American company called Color Systems Technology, next time you watch *Citizen Kane* or *Casablanca* on television or video-cassette you could be seeing the colours of the rainbow. Proustian remembrance will be a thing of the past, when people dreamed in black and white.

Color Systems Technology is a computer company, brainchild of engineer Ralph Weinger, who designed a software system which can differentiate the many shades of grey in a black and white film. According to *Variety*, a 'colorist' moves a 'mouse' over the computer screen 'until the entire frame of the picture is assigned a colour.' Which colour is determined by an art director, second-guessing. Weinger evidently hawked his idea round Hollywood for some years, until the growing video-cassette market in old movies attracted venture capital. The spur, apparently, was a demonstration film about Eisenhower—surely the greyest of subjects—and the company went public in 1985. It now comprises some \$8 million worth of 'state-of-the-art computer equipment', a staff who include Ph.Ds in engineering and computer science as well as a team of 'specially trained artists', and a research department 'who do nothing but dig back into studio archives and other pertinent files to find out such critical things as what colour eyes little Curly Top has.'

There is real ore in this fool's gold. When the 'colorised' version of *Miracle on 34th Street*, a forgotten trifle from 1947, was shown on American television, it turned out to be the highest rated syndicated film for 1985. The market moved. Contracts worth more than \$20 million have been signed, involving the colour conversion of a hundred films in the MGM library (which includes pre-1948 Warner Bros films) and sixteen Shirley Temple films from the Fox vaults. Curly Top, as *Variety* has it, is 'already undergoing a transformation, singing for the first time against a backdrop of rolling green hills and blue skies.' And these are just the primary colours. CST executive Charles Powell says of art director Gene Allen that he has 'the expertise to visualise what a picture would have looked like if it were originally shot in colour.'

An enviable perception, though not quite a *déjà vu*. Colour tint-



Black and white: Fred Zinnemann with Gary Cooper and Grace Kelly while making *High Noon*.

ing of films shot in monochrome is not of course a new phenomenon, though Méliès did it by hand and it was *his* paint-box. We may be comforted to learn that Gene Allen and his staff intend to make 'a concerted effort' (colour by committee?) to assign 'more muted hues to a classic picture'. But what of those who made these pictures, classic or not? Some of them are far from happy to have their films painted by numbers. Fred Zinnemann for one, who sees such tampering as 'a cultural crime of the first order'.

Zinnemann does not mince words. In a letter to Gil Cates, President of the Directors Guild of America, he calls for resistance. 'Can one conceive seeing *Sunset Boulevard* or *Stagecoach* or *The Best Years of Our Lives* in colour, bastardised by people intent on squeezing the last possible penny out of marketing those pictures?' Zinnemann sees the colorisation process as 'against the national interest' and calls for original versions to be protected by federal law. Meanwhile, he says, public opinion both in America and elsewhere should be mobilised to protest, and he hopes that the Directors Guild will play a leading role 'in a resistance which may turn out to be the last stand before the entire art form is totally degraded and goes down the drain.'

Fred Zinnemann's protest was prompted by an appeal to the Directors Guild from George

Stevens Jr, Chairman of the American Film Institute. Stevens asks the Guild to resist what he sees becoming 'a plague on the history of American film' if the process gains momentum. 'The arbitrary and mechanical process of some technician adding to these films his idea of the colour that might apply to them is a violation of the film-maker's work and a vulgarisation of the end result. A generation from now no viewer will have a sure sense of how the world has been seen through the eyes of John Ford, Willy Wyler, Alfred Hitchcock, Orson Welles, or any of the great figures who did so much to define American moviemaking.'

The protest is gathering pace. Colorisation is 'an ugly practice,' says Woody Allen, 'venal, anti-artistic and against the integrity of every film-maker.' John Huston, no stranger to experiments with colour, declares himself 'astounded as to the vulgarity of the whole idea', which he calls 'as great an impertinence as for someone to wash flesh tones on a Da Vinci drawing.'

But what price resistance against the dollar-spinning urge of market forces? It is the film companies who are making the deals, and it is the companies who own the copyright on their black and white past. The commercial argument is that audiences raised on colour tend to skip black and white films (and old TV series) as they flip channels. Colour ver-

sions of *Camille*, *Yankee Doodle Dandy*, *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and *Mutiny on the Bounty*—the first four in the original CST contract with MGM—may keep them watching. And there are other companies in the field, including the Toronto-based Colorization, in which the Hal Roach Studios have a 50 per cent stake. Watch out for Laurel and Hardy coloured. British television audiences have already seen a version of the process in the *Alfred Hitchcock Presents* series.

As Fred Zinnemann says, it may need a federal law to stop the rush to colour. Meanwhile, concludes *Variety*, CST sees no limit to their growth potential; and are now expanding into production, with a one-hour video special on Britain's freshly tinted 'Royals'. As the company says, 'Just think of how many great films were made in black and white.' Not forgetting *Rin Tin Tin*, who is even now being 'processed through a complex maze of computer programs'. Dogs, of course, are colour-blind.

DAVID WILSON

Spanish TV

Catching up after Franco

Spanish broadcasting, stifled by Franco, is still classed as one of the most retarded members of Europe's maturing family of communications systems. Prime Minister Felipe González has, however, promised remedial action. In 1982, the Socialist government gave the go-ahead to private radio stations, but progress towards a plural, independent television system has been held up for both technical and political reasons. During the recent referendum on Spain's membership of NATO, for instance, there was much talk of government influence: 56 per cent of TV coverage of the debate went to the 'yes' lobby, only 24 to the 'no' militants and 14 to the abstentionist right-wing Popular Alliance.

A draft of the long-awaited audio-visual reform, approved in principle by the government, was made known in April. Although the law will not be voted on until after the midsummer elections, which are expected to return the Socialists, it will, if adopted, give the green light to independent television. Spain's public broadcasting service, the RTVE, can also expect a limited overhaul. A further goal is to change the method of nominating RTVE's director: previously appointed by the government, the head of national broadcasting will henceforth be elected by the Cortes.

The draft proposes three national TV channels and at least six regional ones. Three local

channels already exist, in Catalonia, Galicia and the Basque country, and are soon to be increased by others in Madrid and Andalusia. At present, the RTVE monopoly only provides two national networks, one of which does not come on air until after 7 p.m. The new channels, which are to be funded on private European capital and financed solely by advertising, will be subject to moderately strict guidelines. Concessions will be granted for renewable ten-year periods and operators must guarantee to be on air for a minimum of four hours a day. Forty per cent of programmes must be produced in-house, 50 per cent must come from EEC sources, and there must be no more than 10 per cent advertising.

With less than a fifth of France's technical capability, Spain is hard pressed to provide production and diffusion services for the RTVE. Moreover, since 1984 the public network has received no state funding: its survival depends solely on advertising revenue. Optimists in Madrid are nevertheless speculating on a 50 per cent increase in advertising demand once the new channels are established. If this proves correct, the beleaguered RTVE should only be deprived of about a quarter of its income, last year 64,000m pesetas (£300m).

The new channels will not be launched before the end of 1987, but already several major communications groups are preparing their candidature. The Italian media magnate Silvio Berlusconi is poised on the starting line after his purchase last year of the Estudios Roma in Madrid. Currently negotiating with Berlusconi is the Spanish press group, the Zeta, which owns such leading titles as the weekly *Interviú* and the daily *El Tiempo*. A second group is formed by the popular democratic daily *El País* and the Radio Ser network, which owns 146 stations. A possible third starter is the conservative press group, the ABC, owner of the influential *Vanguardia*.

On the periphery may appear the Franco-Hispanic tv production company Euroam Films, which has its eye on the international market for Spanish-language programmes. With a site already picked in Madrid for studios to rival those of Berlusconi, the company aims to establish direct links with Spain's future independent broadcasters, who will urgently need technical and creative backup if they are to fulfil their programme quotas. Euroam is at present producing a serial treating the subject of the International Brigades during the Spanish Civil War.

BELINDA MEARES



Ping Pong: an Arsenal supporter from Gerrard Street.

Hong Kong

The Chinese are coming...

The striking feature of this year's Hong Kong film festival was the power and conviction of the new Chinese cinema. *Yellow Earth*, gratifyingly, seems to have been the start of something rather than a flash in the wok. Just how fast Chinese movies have matured is evident from the 1981 film, *A Corner Forsaken by Love*, which was so controversial in its day that Peking shelved it for five years. It now looks embarrassingly pat—from its regulation political sentiments ('The Gang of Four is down so now we'll have a kick of democracy') to its arch romantic interludes, in which the hero is admonished for wanting to see foreign films, where 'they even show people kissing'. Poppycock like this gave Chinese cinema a bad name for 35 years.

Not that everything has changed. Leong Mo-ling, who runs the festival's Asian section, can tell disheartening stories about the trivia she had to endure before finding three fine contemporary films—*Sacrifice of Youth*, *Swan Song* and *Wild Mountain*. These are beautifully and subtly shot in a way seldom seen in Chinese movies since 1949. The sentiments, by and large, ring true; the photography and visual metaphors are poetic; they revive a tradition of honesty and commitment too long absent from the cinema.

Yan Xueshu's *Wild Mountain*, a deft, outspoken account of sexual politics in a Shanxi village, is as frank about human relations as *A Corner Forsaken*

by *Love* is not and boasts an excellent score by Xu Youfou. *Sacrifice of Youth*, distinguished by colour photography that gives the film the burnished tones of a late, golden afternoon, is the most picturesque of the three. Written and directed by Miss Zhang Luanxin, it depicts the effects on an entire generation of enforced rustication during the Cultural Revolution. It also contrasts the emotional inhibitions of the dominant Han race with the spontaneity of the more extrovert Dai minority people, among whom the heroine is lodged when she is sent to the country at the age of seventeen. Though influenced by *Yellow Earth* in colour, framing and ethnic detail, *Sacrifice of Youth* has an integrity of its own.

Not the most successful of the trio but the one that promises most is Zhang Zeming's first film, *Swan Song*, about an aged composer driven into professional silence when his music is reviled as a relic of the feudal past. Using a shot of the grey, rainy street in which the old man lives as both metaphor and punctuation, Zhang shows how his fortunes decline with every change of tack in modern China. At last, his priceless instrument flogged behind his back to buy a worthless one-way ticket to Hong Kong, his melodies pirated for the hit parade, he burns his surviving scores. This scene, shot in poignant slow motion, recalls the De Sica of *Umberto D*.

But *Swan Song* is not yet over. In a coda set in modern Canton, the style changes dramatically. The dominant colour key shifts from blue to red and the eye is assailed with ads for every

conceivable artefact of western consumerism. As a final irony, the old man's music is revived, but travestied in a thundering, Hollywood-style concerto, while his son is left to strum 'Oh Susanna' on the sidewalk. This is a flawed film. The closing gear change is ragged and parts of the last episode betray inexperience, but at its best it is an impressive achievement.

How long the Chinese film spring will last is an open question. The festival was unable to obtain three other Chinese works it wanted to show—*The Black Cannon Incident*, a political satire by Huang Jianxin, in which a cryptic message relating to a chess move is mistaken for a secret code, *One and the Eight*, a visually handsome war film shot by Zhang Yimou, cameraman on Chen Kaige's *Yellow Earth*, and the new film by Chen himself, *Inspecting the Troops*. It is not good news that, in January, the up-and-coming Dengist, Hu Qili, proposed a series of measures to 'right the wrongs in movie work' and announced that 'bad movies' would be banned because 'we cannot sponsor bourgeois liberalism'.

Hong Kong itself fielded little of interest; it was not a vintage year. But Jerry Liu who, until last year, ran the festival's international section, wrote the quirky script for Leong Po-chih's *Ping Pong*, a Capra-esque comedy-drama about a dead man's will, filmed in London's Chinatown. Featuring a rich collection of ethnic oddballs—an Arsenal supporter who has never left his Gerrard Street basement, a Chinese Cockney, a diplomat from the People's Republic with a penchant for listening to Prince

Charles talking about technology—Leong's film is as Chinese as fish and chips, but, as any Briton knows, that can be authentic, too.

The Japanese selection lacked bite. *The People of Rokkasho*, an almost three hour, talking-heads documentary in 16mm black and white about the purchase of land for a nuclear power station, would have benefited from more rigorous editing. Some found humour in Tsuyoshi Takamine's Okinawan tall-tale, *Paradise View*, about dirt-eating humans and drug-crazed pigs that turn every colour of the rainbow, but the most intriguing item was a 70-minute history of Japanese animation from 1910 compiled by the cartoonist Taiji Yabushita. Tracing the evolution of the medium from blackboards to cut-out cards to celluloid, it affords fascinating glimpses of artists almost unknown in the West—Sanae Yamamoto, who designed an ambitious cartoon version of the *Narayama* legend one year after the 1923 earthquake; Kazugoro Arai, whose shadow film of *Madam Butterfly* looks as if it could have given Lotte Reiniger a run for her money; and the wartime propagandists, Ryuichi Yokoyama and Mitsuyo Seo, whose powerful cartoons about submarines and suicide pilots eclipse the Disney of *Victory Through Airpower*.

Finally, from Spain, cameraman Carlos Suarez has made an elegant, witty debut as a writer-director with *The Secret Garden*. A jolly tale of everyday perversion, it tells of a cool, long-limbed lady executive who gets regular letters from her dead lover instructing her to give and take 'discipline' with a member of the same sex. Sophisticates, who may have felt neglected since Buñuel died, should not be disappointed.

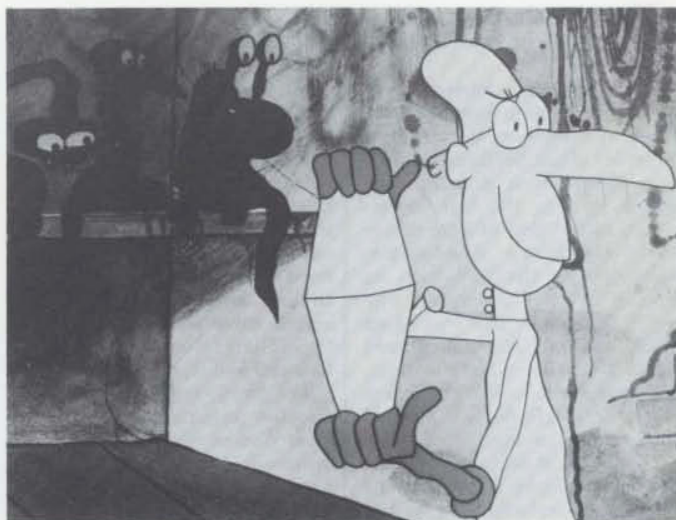
ALAN STANBROOK

Cuba

Hollywood visitors and Havana vampires

The fifth Havana Film Festival was a demonstration that there is more to cinema than Hollywood and the 'Eurobland, megabuck copycats'. Thirty-four countries sent delegations; 464 films were shown, mostly to packed houses; virtually every major Latin American film-maker was there, with plans being laid for future collaborations; and the guests were a striking mix, including Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jack Lemmon, Gastón Kaboré, Harry Belafonte, Armand Mattelart and Robert De Niro. In an impromptu 40-minute closing speech, Fidel Castro displayed a substantial knowledge of cinema history, recounting scenes and titles with a sense of humour that many foreign guests found disarming and unexpected.

Quality was mixed, inevitably in a festival which aimed for comprehensiveness. The sheer volume of information on Caribbean and Latin American struggles contained in the many documentaries clearly demonstrated, however, the irregular and piecemeal coverage of happenings in these parts by European newspapers and television. The support offered by the Hollywood stars, all of whom expressed interest in making films in Cuba (suitable scripts forthcoming), was crucial. Jack Lemmon spent four hours with Castro and an evening jamming on the piano with his son Chris and a host of Cuban musicians. Other stars, passing unrecognised as tourists, visited schools, factories and markets. Harry Belafonte, an old friend of Cuba, discussed a series of projects as



Vampiros en la Habana.

producer, including a film on Nelson Mandela to be made in collaboration with his wife Winnie. Chances are that Cuban co-productions with independent US companies may not be far off.

The Cuban cinema itself is experiencing a New Wave which could turn out to be as impressive and original as that of its legendary militant period of the 60s and 70s. Top priority, it seems, is given to a dozen first and second-time directors. Of the six features from these directors completed so far, three were outstanding and marked a clear break with the rhetorical style of recent Cuban work. Jesús Díaz's *Lejanía*, winner of the critics' prize, is the story of a mother returning to Cuba from the United States to try to persuade her son to come away with her. Díaz is not inclined to pull his punches. He examines every aspect of his subject in the manner of a Rohmer, aware of the ironic potential of a camera confined within a flat.

Jesús Díaz's developed sense of cinematic style, which matches his reputation as a novelist, is in marked contrast to the highly commercial, almost American-paced comedies of his younger brother Rolando, which provide an unexpected example of comic self-criticism refreshingly based on contemporary issues. His first film, *Los Pajaros Tirandole a la Escopeta* (*Birds Will Fly*), was a farce about sexual mores and the generation gap, while his second, enthusiastically received at the festival, deals with the retirement of a baseball hero.

Although there were still traces of the old rhetoric in some younger directors' work, lyricism and pure cinephilia are beginning to be the rule rather than the exception. The generation which has finally come to take the Revolution for granted is now willing, it seems, to take a straight look at Cuban society today. To Orlando Rojas, growing up in the mid-60s was a case

of 'Nicholas Ray meets Cuban Graffiti': in his *Una Novia Para David*, a far-fetched but touching love story, a boy from the imaginary village of Esperanza falls for the plump revolutionary, a fellow university student, rather than the pretty but superficial *habañera*.

The most striking Cuban film on show took six years to make. *Vampiros en la Habana*, an animated feature by the veteran director Juan Padron, has gangs of European vampires poised to defeat their Chicago cousins—the prize is an elixir which will allow them to walk in daylight. The interested parties convene in Havana, but the ensuing struggle involves the whole world. This hilarious and brilliantly executed film is surely destined to become a cult of *Yellow Submarine* proportions. A final note on Cuba's women directors: the most promising, it seems, is Marisol Trujillo, whose short *Oracion* (*Prayer*), based on a poem by Ernesto Cardenal, analyses the myth of Marilyn Monroe and the fate of female sex symbols.

DON RANVAUD

Berlin

Magdalena's last curtain call

In the 60s one went to Berlin for the films of the French New Wave which Cannes would not (or did not) show: *Alphaville*, *La Collectionneuse*, *Le Bonheur*. In the 70s one went for that German new wave which first crashed upon Berlin in 1968 with Herzog's *Signs of Life* and Fassbinder's 1969 debut *Love Is Colder Than Death*. In the 80s... well, there was Reinhard Hauff's *Stammheim: The Trial*, which took this year's Golden Bear. Hauff has had films shown at Berlin for more than a decade, but this lifeless reconstruction of the Baader Meinhof trial of ten years



Swan Song.

ago was too schematic and impersonal to be of any but sociological interest.

The pickings among new German films were poor this year. There was, however, one nostalgic reminder of the Berlin of the 70s: *Rose King*, which played in the Forum. It was the last performance of the diva of high-camp-kino, Magdalena Montezuma, who co-wrote the film with its director Werner Schroeter. She was dying as the film was being made (indeed succumbed two weeks after the end of shooting), and perhaps because one knew this her performance seemed particularly moving.

This apart, it was something of the same mixture as before: tons of operatic performances on the soundtrack overlaying and intensifying a not very compelling plot and theme. Anna, a woman in her mid-40s (Montezuma, of course), has a 25-year-old son by an Arab father who has only two interests: grafting blood-red roses and an attractive 20-year-old Italian named Arnold. Inevitably, all ends both in roses and in (too much) blood. Yet the film has something to offer: Schroeter's audiovisual collage technique works. The operatic selections raise the temperature of the film and enlarge and intensify its theme. Some consider this 'cheating': others have done it (Pasolini used Bach, for example, in *Accattone*), but seldom with such success as Schroeter.

Doubtless because of the 25-year-old boycott of Berlin by the Socialist countries, Miklos Jancsó had only two films at the festival—and they (*Allegro Barbaro* and *The Tyrant's Heart*) were in the Information section. This year he was in competition with a Franco-Israeli production, *L'Aube* (*Dawn*), which was also his first non-tv film in several years. Based freely on Elie Wiesel's first novel, and spoken in French, it is set in Palestine in 1947: Elisha, an 18-year-old survivor of the camps, joins Irgun and its battles with the British Palestine Police. That Jancsó can sometimes succeed with an intimate film was proven more than twenty years ago by *My Way Home*. Since then, however, he has been at his best with casts of hundreds moving in meaningful geometric patterns. 'To show things in bright colours is devastating,' he once said, and it was true of all those films set on the horizontal Hungarian plains from *The Roundup* through *Red Psalm* to *Elektra*.

Here the colours are muted, just as the morality of the film is more ambiguous and equivocal. It only really comes to life in its last twenty minutes, when Elisha waits for the dawn with his victim, Captain John Dawson (Michael York). The British

officer is to be executed by this boy (Dawson has a son his age) in reprisal for the death of an Irgun 'terrorist'. (I add the quote marks because Jancsó seems undecided about Israel's struggle for independence.) The complicity between the two men is marvelously rendered, not only by the actors, but also by Jancsó's camera, which, although confined to a room, makes miraculous circling movements while the actors move in a reverse direction. The cameramen are Raoul Coutard and Armand Marco.

The most important German director present at Berlin was Wim Wenders, and he seemed to be spending most of his time with Fred Zinnemann, the subject of one of Berlin's two retrospectives (the other was the actress Henny Porten). The Zinnemann films from the 30s and 40s, before *High Noon*, were notably well-attended and yielded a number of discoveries. *Redes*, the film he made in Mexico in the 30s, was visually ravishing: not surprising since it was, I believe, the only feature to have been shot by the great American photographer Paul Strand. *Act of Violence* (1949) remains engrossing, with a moral complexity far surpassing that of most films made in Hollywood today. It also had the bonus of one of Mary Astor's best, if uncharacteristic, performances as a (very European) whore with a heart of gold.

A little-known film of the early 40s, *Eyes in the Night*, was a charming surprise. A blind detective (Edward Arnold), aided by a formidably well-trained Alsatian (Friday), comes to the rescue of

Ann Harding who is up against a gang of Nazi spies. She must also contend with a jealous step-daughter, the young Donna Reed, who here foreshadows her breakthrough from 'the girl next door' in *From Here to Eternity*: her uppercut to Katherine Emery's chin was worth the price of admission.

Even *High Noon*, which I must be one of the few people alive never to have seen, looks good set against today's Hollywood. Only 85 minutes long, it observes the unities and is positively Aristotelian in its struggle between love and duty. What the young Germans used to call 'Papa's Kino' doesn't look so bad any more.

RICHARD ROUD

Propaganda

60s refuseniks and the media society

Ten years after the idea was first mooted, the Institut National de la Communication Audiovisuelle (INA) embarks this summer on its biggest ever production. Co-financed by TF1, which put up half the 9m franc budget, Canadian, Swiss and Belgian tv, *The Image and Its Power* (*Considerations on Propaganda*) is one of French tv's most ambitious series, bringing together material from the film archives of the world, interviews with directors and technicians, and commentaries by sociologists and philosophers interested in the media.

The six-part series, due for peak-time transmission in

autumn 1987, is the brainchild of Thierry Garrel and Louisette Neil, whose collaboration dates back to 1975: INA had just been formed and had taken over the ORF Archive in which Neil had been employed as a librarian and Garrel had the job of developing the catalogue. This background gave the pair an unrivalled knowledge of the contents of the archive (which includes much newsreel material) and a willingness to question its traditional use as a supplier of so-called 'library pictures', the apparently innocent and unproblematic 'illustrations' of historical events.

They then became producers and made creative use of the archive by taking a voluntarily critical approach to the image in general. The result was the three series (extracts of which were seen at the NFT in May), *Hiéroglyphes* (1975-76), *Rue des Archives* (1978-81) and *Juste une Image* (1982-83), in which Garrel and Neil developed their particular brand of compilation film. Where *Hiéroglyphes* is conventionally constructed with long, strongly thematised sequences and an obtrusive commentary, *Juste une Image* has no voiceover commentary, its composition is altogether more elliptical, and the spectator is assumed to be capable of making his own connections and drawing his own conclusions.

The germ of *The Image and Its Power* was contained in a 25-minute sequence of *Hiéroglyphes* devoted to the French Army Cinémathèque. This turned out to contain so much fascinating material that Neil and Garrel

Miklos Jancsó's *L'Aube*.





The Image and Its Power.

additionally made a two-hour compilation film which combined propaganda material and clips from the Army Training films described by Garrel as 'absolutely hilarious'. The Army failed to see the joke and refused to allow the film to be screened, but TFI remembered it when they were casting around in 1984 for producers for a propaganda project.

As may be imagined, this series will not be a conventional history of propaganda, with a supposedly objective approach, didactic commentaries and academic distancing devices. Neil and Garrel were joined by three directors, Pierre Beuchot (who made *Time Wrecked*), Philippe Collin and François Porcile (who recently adapted Roland Barthes' *Mythologies* for television), and after six months working on a pilot, the team set off earlier this year, singly or in pairs, to select their material from the world's archives. Each programme will therefore be a very personal statement, although the general outline was agreed in advance. Nor is the structure of the series conventionally chronological. The idea is to alternate what are called 'Dossiers'—which are more firmly located in time and space—with three 'Essays' which frame and explicate the Dossiers.

Propaganda before and during the Second World War and a film anthology of the rise of Fascism and Nazism, together with the way the Allies learned from the German example and mounted their counter-propaganda offensive, makes up the first Dossier. The second is devoted to Soviet propaganda 'from 1907 agitprop to socialist-realist academicism' and the way 'the artistic community was reduced to a purely academic role', while the third breaks newer ground. Entitled 'Made in USA' and inspired by J. Fred MacDonald's book *The Movie Road to the Vietnam War*, it looks at American propaganda, especially on television, 'from the Cold War to Star Wars'.

Juxtaposed are the three 'Essay' programmes which open and close the series. The first, 'Propaganda and Its Audience', examines the means of distribution and talks to film-makers, technicians and audiences from 'the beginnings of the cinema to global tv'. It also examines the way the work of early theoreticians of the mind, such as Freud

and Pavlov, relates to that of modern thinkers such as Packard, Enzensberger and Baudrillard. The intermediate Essay, number three in the series, is a close reading of several film 'texts' showing, for example, 'how an anti-communist film made in the 1950s uses exactly the same stylistic devices as a Soviet film made in 1918', referring to the Kuleshov experiment and the efforts of modern film-makers, like Godard or Chris Marker, to deconstruct films by dislocating sound and image. The final Essay, 'The Totalitarian Image?', looks at the function of images today.

Why propaganda and why now? As a result of the Second World War, Grierson's dictum that 'propaganda is the art of public persuasion' was largely ignored. Propaganda became firmly associated in the public mind with totalitarian regimes—one thinks of Bazin's strictures against the 'cinema of montage' and his praise of the 'democratic' Hollywood style. The perception that, as Paul Rotha put it, 'all cinema is propaganda' was altered to a belief that propaganda was bad, something the other side did, while what 'we' did was advertising. All this changed with the Vietnam War, when the Americans went global in their effort to win hearts and minds and alerted a whole generation to the workings of 'ideology'.

As Thierry Garrel explained, this project is, in part, a long-term result of the disillusionment produced by the Vietnam adventure. But what is perhaps more significant and novel about *The Image and Its Power* is that it shows how the 60s refuseniks have finally come to terms with the media society. For the first time the whole range of images produced, including much of the apparently insignificant output of television, will be considered worthy of attention: information and training films, advertisements, video clips, cartoons, posters... This, then, is the first attempt to look critically at the total output of images in our society and to enable the viewer to do so as well, while at the same time remaining entertaining. A brave attempt perhaps, but anyone who has seen *Juste une Image* will not doubt Garrel and Neil's capacity to pull it off.

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THE BODLEY HEAD

PARKER

It was enterprising of Thames Television to mark the conclusion of British Film Year by inviting three film-makers to present personal views of the cinema. And it was characteristic of this strangely cantankerous industry, with its near genius for scoring own goals, that two of the three should have used the opportunity to take bites out of other British film-makers and institutions. Alan Parker snapped at, among other things, Channel 4 films, the British Film Institute and Derek Jarman. David Puttnam's comment during the Parker programme that 'Happily, an Oscar is not something Derek Jarman will ever have to worry about,' is clearly destined to take its place in British film folklore. Parker's sharp cutting gave it an edge and acidity which might well have been less evident if we had heard the remark in context.

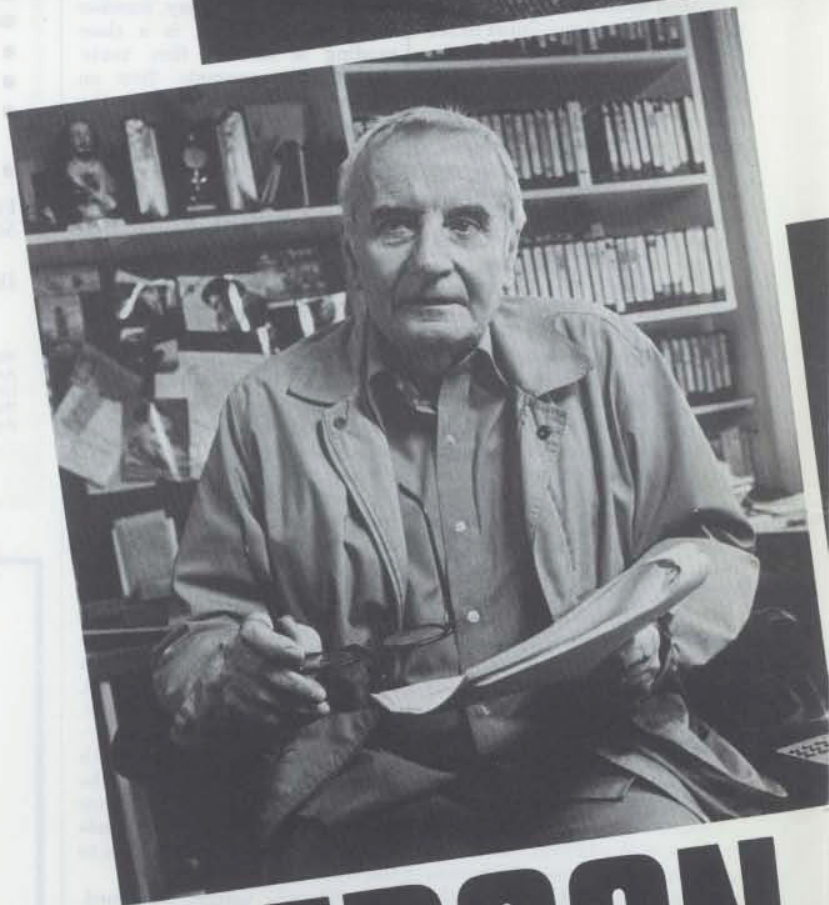
Lindsay Anderson levelled the score in his programme by going for David Puttnam (and would have been ruder, it's said, if a lawyer's letter had not been shot smartly across the bows of the programme). He also criticised British Film Year, seeming even at this late stage not to have grasped that BFI was essentially to do with exhibition rather than production. Anderson was still complaining that too few film-makers had been involved in it. 'Only *Wolf Rilla*, on the *Education Committee*,' he said, in tones that dripped the heaviest sarcasm. At the end of his own (non-controversial) programme, Richard Attenborough pulled up literally in his tracks to tack on stop-press interviews with Parker and Anderson, trying to make them see the error of their ways about the BFI and BFI respectively. Parker looked slightly chastened; Anderson not so. Somehow, this all seemed irresistibly reminiscent of the head calling in two recalcitrant prefects for a wiggling. It's another oddity of the British film industry that it so often washes not only its dirty but its clean linen in public.

Attenborough's own programme demands the least comment precisely because it was the least quarrelsome. For all the layers of film-maker, businessman and industry statesman that have formed over the years, Sir Richard remains heart and soul an actor, and this was an actor's programme,

concerned with defining the actor's role in the film process. The mixture of clips and interviews added up to an amiable anthology, though it might have been more illuminating if Attenborough had concentrated more analytically on his own performances, the progression from the scared young stoker of *In Which We Serve* to such generous and finely finished studies as his General Outram in Satyajit Ray's *The Chess Players*. Among the many interviews, he allowed us a tantalising glimpse of Joan Greenwood, the enchantress of Ealing, and a fascinating comment by David

Lean on Carol Reed. 'Carol was the best of us,' Lean said, 'but we all know that he lost his nerve.' 'Loss of nerve' came when instead of being prepared to hold shots from here to eternity, as in the great days of *The Third Man*, Carol Reed took to cutting into them. There is something to be said for having film-makers interviewed by film-makers. One doubts whether David Lean would have been so precisely illuminating to a mere reporter.

Alan Parker had clearly taken the most time and trouble with his programme, endearingly titled *A Turnip-Head's Guide to the Cinema*. He earned his ninety minutes running time, against



ANDERSON

ATTENBOROUGH



an hour for each of the other two. Parker provided jokes and skits and imaginary characters (comedy series have been constructed around less promising subjects than his two definitively disillusioned usherettes); and he took the 'personal' emphasis most to heart. The Islington bruiser, or cheeky chappie, let us see something of his own journey from screen-struck small boy to big-time director. At the end of his show, there was Parker directing away in a school playground, and brushing aside unwanted advice from a little boy who thought he could have found somewhere more interesting to put the camera. Whether the child was an incipient critic or a young Alan Parker was not entirely clear.

For Parker, the cinema is 'magic' and the magic was first inhaled in the run-down picture palaces of North London. Among examples, he included the magical final shot of *The Third Man* (a few years later, if we are to trust David Lean, Carol Reed might have wrecked it

by cutting in close-ups of Valli and Joseph Cotten). Parker promptly followed it with a less long-held street shot of his own from *Midnight Express*; which suggested that he had the confidence to believe his own film could stand the comparison—or the greater confidence to think it wouldn't matter that it didn't.

As a busy, successful and talented film-maker, with a witty sideline as a cartoonist, Alan Parker ought to be confident. Somehow, he isn't, and his programme threaded its way through a series of confused attitudes and muffled or unexpressed resentments which are by no means, one suspects, unique to Parker. At times, he seemed to be suggesting that the only British film-makers seriously worth bothering about were the likes of himself, Hugh Hudson, Ridley Scott, David Puttnam as a producer—those with access to the major means of production and the American market. But Parker, who has a generosity towards other film-makers not always apparent in British directors, also looked back with admiration at a film like *Kes*. At the same time he laughed at Channel 4 movies, presented

a television screen as a cage, from within which a trapped film-maker (himself) beat peevishly against the bars. A nice image, but Parker must be as aware as anyone else that if the small, independent-minded films he praises are to be made in the late 80s, it will most likely be by way of Channel 4 or BBC2. Rubbishing TV films could be described as cutting off one's nose to spite someone else's face.

And then there is Parker's 'turnip-head' pose. A few years ago, he was unwarrantably and extravagantly irritated by *The Draughtsman's Contract*—or perhaps by critics and others who were 'taken in' by Peter Greenaway's film, which may amount to much the same thing. Why did he mind so much? In the Thames programme he played a low, discreditable, cartoonist's trick on Anthony Smith, director of the BFI, fading out the sound in mid-sentence and leaving Smith chattering silently away in the corner of the screen, marooned like the Queen's head on a postage stamp, while a cinema organ rose to its full height to drown him out. (And, naturally, it was Parker Wurlitzing.) Smith's last audible sentence had something to do with structuralism, which showed the director of the BFI as second to none in popping his head into the lion's mouth. Structuralism has nothing to do with magic; cinema organs do; and Parker has a cartoonist's access to magic.

Then, of course, there are 'the critics', one subject at least on which all three film-makers of the Thames programmes, and probably most other film-makers, can find common ground. Parker went after 'the eunuchs'; David Puttnam, during his interview on the Parker programme, demoted them from 'critics' to 'reviewers'; Lindsay Anderson disparagingly suggested that 'all critics are middle class', ignoring the evident fact that the burden of being middle class is one also carried by the overwhelming majority of film-makers, including Anderson himself. Even Richard Attenborough had a much publicised recent brush with the New York press.

Film-makers don't like critics; and no wonder. They tend to feel that the critic is not a qualified person, that only

PARKER ANDERSON ATTENBOROUGH

someone who has been through the torment and exhilaration of making a film is properly authorised to know what that means. 'I would rather be judged by my peers,' they say, dismissing the penny-a-liner whose only qualification, in fact, is that he puts words on paper and someone pays to have them printed. The film-maker arrives at the press show in an acutely vulnerable state. Behind him are years of work and worry in making the film; ahead are months of ghastly TV chat shows, inane interviews with reporters who may hardly have bothered to memorise his film's title, trips to festivals in unappealing places. The critic emerges from the screening to say nothing more than 'A bit long, wasn't it?' Insufferable.

One problem is that no one sets out to make a bad film, just as no one sets out to own a slow racehorse; and bad films, like slow racehorses, cost as much in upkeep and general wear and tear and perhaps may even come to be specially cherished by their proprietors. Because most films, by the nature of things, end up bad, or at least less than good, most film-makers are led to suspect that most critics hate films, plying a trade in which they have no real or honest interest for the major purpose of undermining the film-maker's confidence. This is an exaggeration, but only slightly so. One could easily demonstrate that the critics (in London, if not in New York) have virtually no power to dent the takings of a natural winner at the box office, but that they do quite often significantly help a small film to reach its public. The film-maker is not persuaded: even if his own reviews have been largely sympathetic, he still suspects the critic as a potential mugger, waiting for a chance to put the boot in.

Individual critics get on well with individual film-makers. In general, however, there is probably no happy resolving of this fraught and tetchy relationship. One reason is that film-makers start with the process and arrive at the product and that critics, by necessity and not out of perverse ignorance, must work backwards from the product. Another reason, not only affecting films, is the generally low level of public discussion about the arts, the sycophantic and grovelling style of so much press and TV interviewing and the dominance of the public relations industry and its attitudes. When every film has to be aggressively sold, with the director up to his neck in the marketing process, the critic's outsider status is empha-

sised. He becomes the only player who hasn't learned the rules. The fundamental problem, however, is probably that the director puts himself at risk with every film he makes, while the critic only runs the risk of being assaulted by the film-maker—and that only in extreme circumstances, and with a rolled up newspaper. This is just one of the great unfairnesses of life, as is the fact that the film-maker travels by Concorde and the critic by the Number 19 bus.

There were no nostalgic excursions for Lindsay Anderson, and for once his own jibe at 'the critics' seemed hardly more than ritual. Anderson wore a voluminous red shirt for his programme (possibly his television rig; it reappeared for the Attenborough interview), kept a photograph of John Ford at his elbow, and had chosen for the occasion a school-masterly manner which hinted that any frivolity in the back rows would be jumped on. None too ingratiatingly, he indicated that he had only made the programme in the first place to register his distrust of British Film Year and his disagreement with David Puttnam, who had spoken in an interview ('in *Marxism Today*,' said Anderson, as though that made it worse) of film as for better or worse an American medium.

David Puttnam has stayed in Britain to produce little films like *Local Hero* and *Cal* when he could no doubt have earned a great deal more money with a great deal less effort as a Hollywood producer. One would give him the benefit of the doubt and assume he was talking economic fact rather than artistic theory. For Anderson, however, Puttnam was denigrating a British tradition, and he rose mightily to its defence. In general, the tradition was realism, or poetic realism. Specifically, it was Free Cinema, born in the momentous year 1956 and therefore in any case due for an anniversary celebration, and largely though by no means exclusively the creation of Lindsay Anderson.

Launched in a small way, with an NFF programme and a manifesto of intent, Free Cinema was a turning point in the affairs of British cinema. It looked back, consciously and not in anger, to Humphrey Jennings; it looked forward to *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (Karel Reisz), the film version of *Look Back in Anger* (Tony Richardson) and *This Sporting Life* (Anderson). Its house cameraman was Walter Lassally. It was not narrowly British. Two young Swiss who happened to be working in London went out and turned a camera on Piccadilly Circus and made *Nice Time*: Alain Tanner and Claude Goretta. And in the romanticism of *Every Day Except Christmas* and the censoriousness of *O Dreamland* Anderson himself defined, as it were, the poles of his talent. In spite of everything that has happened since, including the technical advances for documentary, the extracts in the Thames programme came across as fresh as paint.

Anderson dislikes, with reason, the

tub-thumping and Oscar emphasis, the yelps of 'The British are coming' and the notion that it all started with *Chariots of Fire*. But he had rather to duck the issue that of the three British Free Cinema directors from the first days who went on to major careers in features, Tony Richardson has become to all intents and purposes an American film-maker and Karel Reisz has worked more of late in Hollywood than in Britain. Doesn't this rather reinforce Puttnam's point? Anderson, who stayed at home and has managed to direct only four cinema features in a quarter of a century, to our and presumably his regret, ended his lecture ('The Party Political Broadcast,' someone called it) by identifying *Britannia Hospital* as the last Free Cinema film. He uses words too precisely to say 'last' when he merely means 'latest'. We must take it that in his mind a line has been drawn, an epitaph written, and that there is to be no more Free Cinema.

The final image he chose for his programme was characteristically minatory: absurdity, chaos and pretension within the hospital, while the violent and the dispossessed beat at the gates. Free Cinema was born in the year of Suez. *Britannia Hospital* came out during the Falklands summer. Its advertising campaign had to be hastily changed: a bandage-swathed figure dangling a Union Jack went out, and in came the simple slogan 'It's outrageous', written in what looked to be Lindsay Anderson's hand. One might have hoped that Anderson, one of the heavyweights of a generally lightweight industry, could have made the weight tell in his programme. He had the material, and he needn't have taken time on so many well-worn clips, like that old friend the eating scene from *Tom Jones*. And there is, after all, life after *Britannia Hospital*. Free Cinema was indeed part of a British tradition, but how is that tradition looking now? What links might Anderson see with the work of directors as varied as Stephen Frears and Peter Smith, Bill Douglas and Bill Forsyth? Anderson left Free Cinema looking like a more exclusive club than it had ever seemed in its heyday.

The Thames programmes were revealing for what they were; and equally for what they were not. The series producers, Kevin Brownlow and David Gill, are noted movie archaeologists—Brownlow did the resurrection of *Napoleon*, and in tandem they have been responsible for the Thames Silents, the *Hollywood* series and *Unknown Chaplin*. Certainly in this series they gave the past a much better run than the present. Lindsay Anderson is 63, Richard Attenborough 62, Alan Parker a mere stripling of 42, though even he discovered cinema in the days when everyone went to the pictures once a week. But this is a young man's art, and Thames might have found someone who grew up with television and for whom *Chariots of Fire* is already history. In the end an interesting series, which might have been extended, left us much where we started: there's nowt so odd as the British film industry. ■

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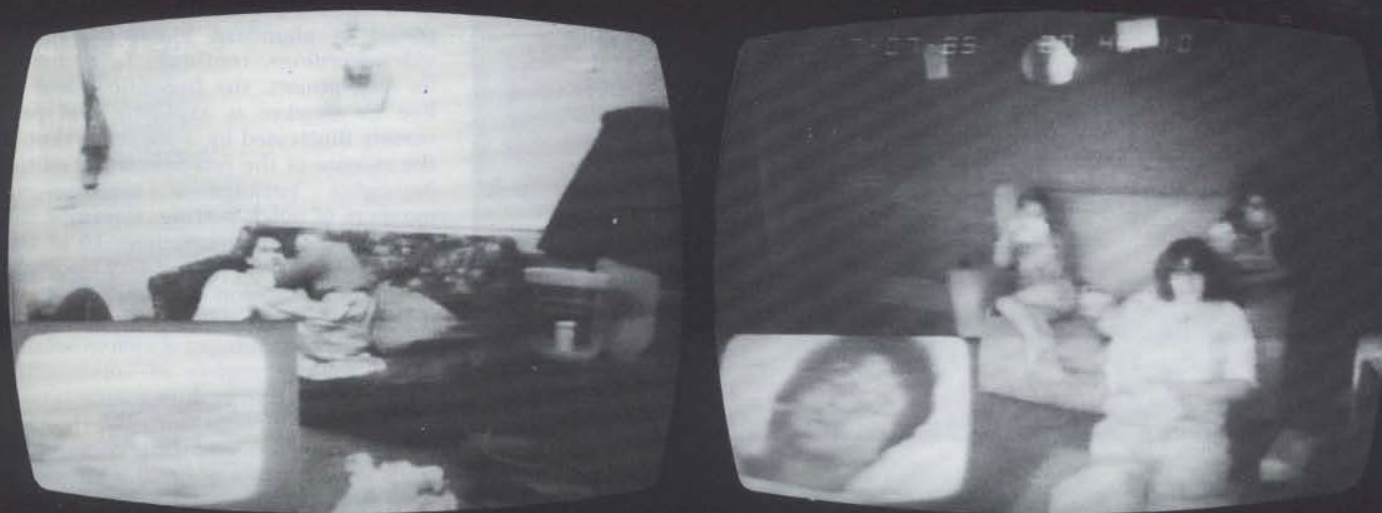
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TELEVISION



on TELEVISION

Charles Barr

Above: Channel 4's *Open the Box*. 'We could see them, they could see us ...'

Whether or not it was intended that way, the Channel 4 series *Open the Box*, broadcast in the early part of this summer, sets itself up in neat opposition to the rrv series broadcast a year earlier, entitled simply *Television*. In the age of the videocassette, projects like these overcome the ephemerality once considered, with good reason, to be the essence of the medium's output, and can thus, like films, continue to be referred to in the present tense even in the aftermath of their screenings: both series, then, *are* (not were) consciously pioneering works which offer to provide non-specialist audiences with new insight into the operations of the rv medium. Within this shared framework of purpose, their scale and approach could hardly be more different.

The titles themselves are eloquent, the one comprehensive, the other exploratory. In the words of the accompanying literature, they respectively constitute 'the definitive account of television' and 'an introduction to some ways of looking at television'. On the one hand, a 13-part 'blockbuster' series transmitted in the 9 to 10 p.m. slot on the full rrv network, with material gathered in lavishly from all over the world in the form both of location shooting and of programme extracts: on the other, a

6-part series going out at 10 p.m. on the minority channel, and drawing its material from closer to home. *Television* comes from Granada, unquestionably the senior among the big rrv network companies in terms of longevity and prestige alike. *Open the Box* is the work of the small independent company Beat Ltd, one of a number of such companies formed to produce material mainly for Channel 4: here, it is operating in collaboration with the BFI's Education Department, which initiated the project. The budget invested by Granada would clearly have been enough to keep *Open the Box* running without a break for several years.

Even if I wanted to, it would be difficult to embark on a full comparative account of the two series. For one thing, not all the programmes are to hand at the time of writing, the later parts of *Open the Box* being still in production as the first part approaches transmission. For another, they cover such different ground, and in such different ways. But this very difference helps to bring out with greater clarity some of the problems and opportunities involved in using television to look at television.

If the problems by and large are illustrated by the Granada series and the opportunities by *Open the Box*, this is

mainly because of the discrepancy in their ambitions. The former takes on the whole of rv history (and indeed geography), the latter has almost no historical or international dimension. Conversely, in formal terms it is *Open the Box* that is considerably the more ambitious, flexible, and self-aware. The apparently unthinking application, in the Granada series, of an unambitious, conventional expository rv syntax to material dealing with the development of rv, including crucially, the complex development of its syntax, has results that are at best competently informative, at worst rather dire.

After two introductory programmes, the first an overview, the second a compressed history of prewar television (*The Race for Power*), this series settles into a succession of diachronic studies of the way in which specific important areas of rv have evolved and been consolidated—in itself a perfectly valid structure. The first of these (programme 3) deals with outside broadcasting in general and sport in particular, and is structurally crucial in establishing a narrative and analytical mode which later programmes (e.g., on news, light entertainment, drama, comedy) will follow. *We Bring You Live Pictures*: the title enforces the reason for giving this



Open the Box: Take the Money and Run.

programme its privileged place. Just as all film used to be silent (apart from accompaniments), so all tv used to be live (apart from segments of film transmitted by telecine): the videotape revolution dates from the late 1950s, and it is sport and obs which keep open the strongest links with that early pre-videotape period by continuing to exploit the power of the live relay in real time, long after fictional genres have ceased to do so, at least directly.

Given that the live period, and its continuing legacy or residue, are as important to any thorough tv history as the silent period is to film history, there are inbuilt problems about representing it: it is more difficult to handle, paradoxically, in audio-visual form than in a written history, much more difficult than it is for an audio-visual film history to handle silent material. By definition, material that was once live, and important for having been seen live, can be live no longer: moreover, if it dates from the pre-videotape years then it is lucky to survive at all, and can do so only

if the telerecording or kinescope process (the actual filming of the tv image) was applied at the time to material which was already perceived as worth preserving, like the 1953 Coronation, some of the telerecording of which is indeed used in *We Bring You Live Pictures*. But this programme also cheats outrageously, more than once, by using newsreel film images, without admitting it is doing so, to represent the original tv images.

This is at its most blatant, and ironically least necessary, in the handling of the 1966 World Cup soccer final (England 4, West Germany 2), which of course survives in telerecorded form, black and white, in a style austere by today's norms, but authentic and evocative. It was also filmed in colour for the cinema, using quite different codes of close-up and montage, and the Granada team have been unable to resist using those images instead, to represent that worldwide tv event which they are rightly positing as a landmark. Context and verbal introduction insist on the specific, shared, present-tense experience

of the live tv event: what the sequence then delivers is the past tense of the film commentary, and of the filmed montage.

This muddle, or sleight of hand, whichever way you look at it, is symptomatic of the method of a programme which, even when it gets safely into the recent period of abundant handsome colour videorecordings, continues to undercut its own project: the hypnotic power of live tv snooker is explicitly and perversely illustrated by a sequence that is the essence of the retrospectively edited highlights package—a machine-gun montage of quick potting. Compare the strategy used in programme 10 of the series, *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly*: within a discussion of violence in tv fiction and its effects, we are repeatedly given snappy montages of violent actions culled from a variety of unidentified sources. By lifting such moments totally out of their dramatic contexts, the programme mimics, and thus insidiously lends support to, a particular simplistic voice in the debate.

Both these programmes, it happens, are credited to Brian Blake, one of a small pool of directors used on the series, but the individual authorship seems of minor relevance. These crudities are only an extreme form of the strategy of the project as a whole, which corresponds to the commonsense institutional concept of 'good television' as anatomised by Stuart Hall in an article published in these pages in Autumn 1976, *tv and Culture*. Characterised by neatness, rapidity and impatient forward movement, 'good television' is nervous of the dangers of low-key visuals, 'dead time', and the expansive exploration of complex ideas or issues. It is hardly an adequate strategy for handling the massive and underexplored subjects of the history and aesthetics of tv, important strands of which have been, and still continue to be, quite precisely opposed to all that is involved in that notion of 'good television'.

The tantalising thing about Granada's *Television* is that it contains such abundant riches, in fragmented form. Sometimes, when archive material is allowed to run as originally transmitted for more than a few brief moments, it can be both electrifying and instructive, as in the extended case study (in programme 4, on the News) of American tv's handling of President Kennedy's assassination, or—on a quite different level—an extraordinary segment from *The Grove Family* (BBC, 1953), nicely described as 'a quaint mixture of government information handouts and class stereotypes' (from programme 6, *The Story Machine*). And there must be a whole lot of wonderful interview footage shut away somewhere in Granada's vaults: the little snippets of talking heads that we get from survivors of the pioneering and early broadcasting days can surely be only the tip of an iceberg. Let's hope it finds a good home.

To be fair to Granada's large production team, a project of that nature has a fairly barren critical context within which to work. Even today, after all the dramatic proliferation of archive pro-

Real People: Leslie Crowther introducing *The Price Is Right*.



gramming in the last few years, there is not really such a thing as a critical history of television in circulation, with the partial and honourable exception of Erik Barnouw's authoritative survey books on American TV (abridged conveniently in one volume as *Tube of Plenty*). Between the blocks of 'dated' raw material and the institutional and technological histories, bridges need to be built.

We need at least some tentative equivalents, in terms of TV history, for the authoritative analyses of the developing formal systems of early cinema that have been provided by writers like Barry Salt and the team of David Bordwell/Kristin Thompson/Janet Steiger. We need, too, a big anthology of critical writings on, and from, television's past, some of which would be drawn from back issues of *SIGHT AND SOUND*, and from its short-lived sister publication of the early 1960s, *Contrast*. We need an edited selection from the TV criticism of Philip Purser, a veteran of *Contrast* and currently the one newspaper critic (*Sunday Telegraph*) with a genuinely informed and intelligently applied sense of TV history. And we need to keep in print such books as Peter Black's *The Mirror in the Corner*.

We also need to sustain projects like *Open the Box*, and to extend its strategies to areas of television beyond those covered in the current 6-part series—not least, to television history. At its best, this series is a genuine and salutary

consciousness-raiser, provoking thoughts about power and manipulation at various levels rather than just stating and illustrating a thesis about them.

Programme 1, *Part of the Furniture*, dramatises engagingly one of the recurrent fears or fantasies about TV, that the screen can see out at us. As a witness from the 1930s says in the second of the Granada programmes, 'We believed they could see into our houses. We could see them, they could see us.' Here, we see the visual record of experiments by Peter Collett, an Oxford psychologist who made recordings from cameras installed alongside the domestic TV set to reveal how people actually watch (or don't watch) television. These extracts are intercut with other material to develop a solid perspective on TV-watching that is bracingly open-minded and basically optimistic. In mild contrast, programme 3, *Take the Money and Run*, an exemplary case study of the overhyped Budd/Decker track confrontation of summer 1985, shows the influence of television and its money on athletics as being more problematic. Where the viewer can take or leave what the screen offers, those involved in sport find this more difficult.

But it is programme 2, *Real People*, that is the most complex and satisfying of the programmes available for preview. It traces and discusses the way in which non-professionals are used in two contrasting television programmes made by the Birmingham-based company

Central: the popular game show *The Price Is Right*, and a filmed documentary. The programme intercuts three strands: the show's preparation and recording, the setting up and filming of a domestic interview, and a set of interviews with TV practitioners, who not only reflect fascinatingly, *qua* media professionals, upon their own methods, but also reflect, *qua* interviewees, upon the way they are being manipulated by the team making *Open the Box*.

As John Percival tells his interlocutor (presumably the programme's unseen director, Gina Newsom): 'When you edit this programme you will edit it the way you want it and will take me out of context if you wish to do so: that's your privilege as a documentary maker.' William Stewart, the game show producer, refers to his own motives in coming out from behind the screen to be interviewed on it. The fact that the couple being interviewed in their house by one TV crew are also host to another one from *Open the Box* is refreshingly acknowledged on all sides.

Finally, in a striking, funny, quite unlabourious echoing of the start of Godard's *Tout Va Bien*, which photographed the fees being paid to its protagonists, Udi Eichler (TV producer/interviewee) is shown receiving and counting out his fee for contributing his time and wisdom to the programme. All this comes together beautifully, adding up to genuine 'educational' television in the least narrow sense of the term. ■

THE RISE AND FALL OF AN AMERICAN GENIUS

ORSON WELLES

CHARLES HIGHAM

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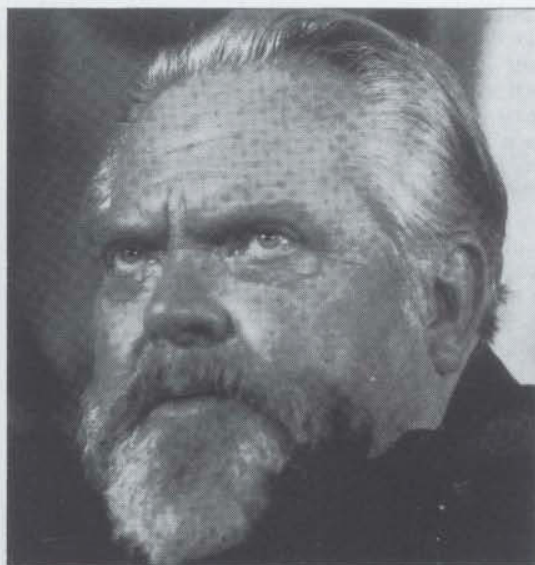
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Cannes '86

Penelope Houston...

1986 will no doubt go down in the Cannes records as the year of the American absence and the British presence. The defection of the likes of Scorsese and Spielberg brought to the surface that mild, mocking anti-Americanism seldom far away in any large European gathering. But if the festival organisers mourned their missing stars, and show business writers were encountered engaged in the doleful business of interviewing each other, the more workaday Americans seemed to be out in force as usual. And the British were everywhere, with films in and out of competition and hauling in the prizes, a rash of market screenings, Michael Powell on a yacht in the bay, and the British pavilion, flying the pennant of its principal sponsors, J&B Whisky, alongside the Union Jack, doing roaring business at all hours.

The pavilion looked like a hovercraft redesigned by Emmett and poised to slide down its beach into the Mediterranean. A fantasy flourish suits Cannes, and there is no doubt that the team which organised the pavilion, persuading the local authorities to let them set up shop in such a handy site, pulled off a notable coup. Only cautious industry stay-at-homes might have thought the publicity game not worth the candle. And whatever our industry's problems—rather forlornly summed up by the Thorn EMI posters overprinted with the all-conquering Cannon logo—the general impression was of great buoyancy. The only lethargic creature around the pavilion seemed to be the guard dog, who looked fairly early in his night's stint as though his feet were killing him.

Security throughout was very tight, and hideously expensive for the organisers. So many cinema exit doors were permanently locked that one felt any run of the mill emergency might have turned into a disaster; even some hotels had security men on the gates. My choicest Cannes sight was the searching at the Palais entrance of a bear—or rather a woman wearing a slightly moth-eaten bear's head, presumably a leftover from last year's *Care Bears* campaign. The guard was laughing as he rummaged in her bag; the bear was clapping its paws at the absurdity of it all. One imagined the next scene as

staged by Hitchcock: the bear skips and capers its cheerful way to the nearest ladies room, takes off its huge head, and unpacks the pistol or bomb or grenade. Luckily, it never happened and never felt like happening, though I was soberingly told, on what authority I know not, that the British pavilion ranked as fourth target on a theoretical hit list, one down from the Cannon office.

I've been coming to Cannes for eight years, and in that time I've seen only two films,' someone tells me, not at all unhappily. One felt even more this year that the films are necessary to attract the press and that the press (and television) are necessary to give the whole jamboree its frenetically self-important status, but that the films on the festival screens are in danger of becoming the expendable part of the whole business. Eventually, we may find ourselves having the festival without the films. And the special excitement which went with the awareness that a whole festival could be overwhelmed by a single screening certainly belongs to a distant past. Film-makers, of course, have to behave as though the possibility were still there.

The giant's role at this year's festival was played by Andrei Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*. Many people saw it as a grand prix winner, but even before *The Mission* had touched down in Cannes, the smart money was on David Puttnam's production: this was not the year in which the festival was likely to frighten the Americans even more by stressing its 'art' side. And Tarkovsky is 'art' with a vengeance, as his poetic parables slowly unfold through the long, long takes (an opening shot here of, I suppose, fully ten beautiful minutes), the circling philosophical speculations, even those moments when it appears that the film

may never move again. But when the director says, 'I believe only the poets will go down in the history of cinema, like Bresson, Dovzhenko, Mizoguchi, Bergman, Buñuel, Kurosawa,' there is no doubting either that Tarkovsky belongs with the poets (why no Antonioni, in that well considered list?) or that he is staking a claim which looks daunting only because its sheer seriousness is so against the modern grain.

The booklet for *The Sacrifice* carries an endorsement by Bergman: '... the one who invented a new language, true to the nature of film as it captures life as a reflection, life as a dream.' And Tarkovsky, here on Bergman territory, with Sven Nykvist as cameraman, Erland Josephson as principal actor and a largely Swedish crew, seems much more at home than with the Italy of *Nostalghia*. In both *Nostalghia* and *Stalker* there was a sense of strain, of imagery being reached for, of Tarkovsky's ever-flowing water steaming away in rapid clouds. *The Sacrifice* says the same things—life as dream, or apocalyptic nightmare; spiritual obligation as sacrifice—but in a more accessible way. The setting is one of those calm, rather plainly beautiful Swedish houses on the edge of a bare wilderness, a location for the edge of the world, or the end of the world ('... in Europe, no corner is safer than where you are now'). The characters include the professor bound for sacrifice (Josephson), a talkative postman, a doctor, a silent little boy. There are echoes of Bergman (of course) and of Chekov, and once or twice I found myself thinking, most unexpectedly, of *Heartbreak House*. But essentially Tarkovsky is a mystic, inescapably drawn to the secrecy and obscurity of divine demand.

Beside this awkward boulder of a film, most of the rest looked like pebbles. A brightly glittering pebble, winner of the prize for direction against the usual stuffiness of festival juries about comedies, was Martin Scorsese's *After Hours*. Richard Combs reviews elsewhere this quintessential New York nightmare for a spry young office worker, played by Griffin Dunne rather after the style of a young Dustin Hoffman, seeming actually to shrink at each new shock in his night's misadventures. In most such distraught comedies, the weakness is that anything, literally, goes—you feel half the scenes could be omitted, shuffled, played forwards or backwards. The beauty of Scorsese's film is a perfectly tight and logical script by Joseph Minion, in which every absurdity has its reason. It's this clever engineering that allows Scorsese to walk the knife-edge between

Fool for Love: Kim Basinger.



wild farce and authentic threat without running the remotest risk of falling off. Real movie-making.

People who had seen Sam Shepard's *Fool for Love* on stage generally seemed to think rather less well of Robert Altman's new film than those of us who hadn't. Set in the shabby El Royale motel on the edge of the New Mexican desert, it's about a couple (she works there; he arrives with a trailer-load of horses) caught up in an obsessive, fatalistic relationship whose past history is shared and explained by the Old Man (Harry Dean Stanton), a sardonic resident of this weary junkyard. Perhaps the production doesn't expand or add to the play, but Sam Shepard and Kim Basinger tear into the leading roles, and at a time when many film-makers are beginning to put their feet up, the sheer theatrical energy with which Altman uses screen space is still something to see. It's a film of raw nerve ends, jokes, screaming matches, wistful gestures, a gun blazing in the night. Not the best of Altman, certainly, but far from the worst.

Marco Ferreri's *I Love You* is about a man's infatuation with his key ring, an unappealing little doll's head which pipes up 'I love you' in response to a whistle correctly pitched. Sulks and misery when our hero, played with imperturbable impassivity by Christophe Lambert, has dental treatment which robs him of his whistle; and a fantasy denouement which not before time sinks the hero along with the film. This silly piece is only worth mentioning as part of a discernible trend towards non-human love objects, perhaps the next subject for exegesis, and exemplified at an altogether higher level by Oshima's *Max, mon Amour*.

Max is a chimpanzee with whom a British diplomat's wife is having an affair; in the intervals of preparing for a royal visit to Paris—nice questions of *placement* and the like—the diplomat has to come to terms with a situation unusual even in terms of one of our less conventional embassies. The tone is ice-cool; the performances of Charlotte Rampling and Anthony Higgins discerning, composed and exact; and Jean-

Claude Carrière, Buñuel's scenarist, has written a cunning bilingual script. The problem is with Max, who might have picked up a thing or two from Emily, the sagacious chimp in John Collier's *His Monkey Wife*. She, if I remember rightly, set out to better herself by hanging about the British Museum reading room. Max has no such aspirations, and because there is nowhere for him to go there is nowhere much for the film to go, for all the exemplary style with which Oshima marks his landfall in Europe.

From Japan itself, two striking films, serious, carefully composed, both in different senses traditionalist. *And Then (Sorekara)*, directed by Yoshimitsu Morita, is a love story adapted from what is apparently a well-known novel set in Japan's Edwardian age, the late Meiji period. The central character, Daisuke, is the dilettante son of a rich, severe old businessman (Chishu Ryu), who upsets his family by refusing to marry or employ himself gainfully. Years earlier, Daisuke had allowed a friend to walk off with the girl he might himself have married; now they meet again, become involved, have to decide whether to upset convention and regain the past. It's a slow, elegantly turned film of mournful, conscience-stricken meetings and family pressures. Is the excess prettiness of some settings—the blossoming trees and the little ornamental bridges—to be seen as irony? One is not quite sure.

The other film, Yoshishige Yoshida's *A Promise*, opens like a detective story, with a police investigation into a mercy killing. Was it the senile husband, the loyal son or the over-strained daughter-in-law who did for a pitiful, bedridden old woman who had wanted only to die? *A Promise* takes an unsparing view of the pains, humiliations and miseries of great age; a sad film, not easy to watch, which apart from a few short scenes of conventional hospital horror is handled with a kind of dedicated concentration.

It would be a pity if Margarethe von Trotta's *Rosa Luxemburg* reduces opportunities for the picture Istvan Szabo has long been planning on the Polish-born demagogue and martyr of the German Left, particularly since the von

Trotta version, though on a subject dear to her heart, has turned out to be rather a stodgy disappointment. Szabo would presumably go for more emblematic attitudes to his heroine. Von Trotta plumps for straightish biography, but has been so sparing with dates and details that her march through Rosa's life is none too informative. And there is something very Germanic about the characterisation of Red Rosa, played by Barbara Sukowa with all the scrubbed resolution which wins festival prizes, as a hectoring scold in public and a sentimental twit-terer in private.

I much preferred a film by another German woman director, Helma Sanders-Brahms' *Laputa*, about an edgy encounter in West Berlin between Sami Frey, a French architect, and Krystyna Janda, a Polish photographer working for someone named Andrzej. Berlin is of course seen as Laputa, an outpost of alienation, Swift's floating island, and quotations from Swift, embellishing the soundtrack and subtitles, lend the film their detached, precise tone of voice. It's not a work which aims particularly high, and we have met before such rather literary devices as the bicycle without pedals, steered about the Berlin rooftop. But the film has sense, as well as a specifically European sensibility. The prospect of more Eng lit quotation, as well as distant memories of *The Saragossa Manuscript*, lured me to *The Intimate Diary of a Sinner*, a film by Wojciech Has based on 'Jamesa Hogga's' *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. But I'm afraid I didn't stay the course: from what I did see of what promised to develop into a not very alluring eighteenth century yarn, one could speculate that Has' particular brand of Polish baroque has coarsened over the years.

Mrinal Sen, in *Genesis*, has gone back to the ruins—more remote and stranger than those of his attractive film called *The Ruins*. The location for his new film, Sen tells me, is an area of Rajasthan where towns were abandoned, legend has it overnight, some four hundred years ago, left to the snakes and scorpions. To one of these derelict, desert places of shale-like crumbling walls come two men and a woman, to play out

The Sacrifice.



And Then (Sorekara).



a parable illustrating Sen's gloomy thesis: 'wretched are the poor and the meek for they shall not inherit the earth.' The two men, a farmer and a weaver, begin to bring life to their wilderness (there's an appealing scene in which a swing is made for the woman); a trader rides in, with a jingle of camel bells, promising something like prosperity. It's obvious, indeed inevitable, that the two men will fall out over the woman, that the trader will betray them, and that another tiny utopia is going to end in tears. Sen is an assured and confident director, but schematism rather gets the better of *Genesis*: although the setting has been well chosen, the incidents have been imposed on it, as though a place without life had denied life to the film.

Elsewhere, there was a certain amount of repetition around, not least from directors taking another look at characters from past successes—*A Man and a Woman—Twenty Years Later*; *Wives—Ten Years After*, and so on. Official security guards kept me out of the Lelouch film, but I gather Trintignant and Anouk Aimée have not fallen on hard times. Rauni Mollberg has remade what is perhaps Finland's most famous film, *The Unknown Soldier* (in fact I thought, wrongly, that there had been more than one version), about young troops in action during the 1940 war with Russia. Honest, concerned filming, plenty of handheld camera shooting of battles among the pines and birches. But does anyone, outside Finland, really want some 160 minutes of the kind of war film most of the audience will feel they already know by heart? And from Argentina Raúl de la Torre's *Poor Butterfly*, an attempt to repeat the success of last year's *The Official Version*, by the same writer, which bogged down early on in its account of Nazis up to no good in 1940s Argentina. Most disappointing, in the well-worn stakes, was Claude Chabrol's *Inspector Lavardin*, seen in the market. Chabrol can rarely have made a more perfunctory film than this bit of Frenchified Agatha Christie, with the detective of *Poulet au Vinaigre* carrying on like Miss Marple.

The Decline of the American Empire is

Laputa: Sami Frey.

a winning title. Expectation fades with the news that this French-Canadian film in the Quinzaine, directed by Denys Arcand, who years ago made *Rejeanne Padovani* and more recently an item in the *Plouffe* saga, is all talk by men about women and women about men. The French-Canadians do, indeed, tend to go on, but the film is much better than it sounds, if not as good as its title, as Arcand's nine characters, all more or less given over to that self-indulgence and self-obsession which may mark the decline of empires, are put through their paces, lie, boast, say what had better been left unsaid. The men, university lecturers with the gift of the gab, are discovered in an idyllic lakeside setting preparing a dainty dinner; the women, meanwhile, are doing some desultory exercises in a gym; the meal, not too much of which seems to get eaten, is the film's centre. A conversation piece for what Arcand calls 'the divorce generation'.

Some films about films—or cinemas. Werner Nekes' *Film Before Film* is an attractive documentary about the fore-runners of moving pictures which draws largely on the director's own collection of material—sly Victorian jokes, magic lanterns and the like, some masterly effects achieved by playing with light. Though the subject is hardly unfamiliar, some of the objects on show are rich and rare. Next, a three-minute squib made by Agnès Varda for the fiftieth birthday of the Cinémathèque, intercutting shots of audiences on the steps of the Cinémathèque and its museum with movie scenes shot on steps (Odessa not omitted). It sounds like nothing at all, indeed child's play. One can only say, lucky Cinémathèque, to have Varda to do it for them. And a small landmark in Cannes history for *Coming Up Roses*, Stephen Bayly's affectionate film about a defunct cinema in a small Welsh town and certainly the first Welsh-language feature to be seen in these parts. It's a *Smallest Show on Earth* for the 1980s, as a mushroom farm springs up in the derelict stalls and miners' lamps, also no longer needed for their proper purpose, are used to check on the state of the crop. Deservedly, it went down very well. □

...and Richard Roud

Three of the best films I saw at Cannes were French. But they could hardly have been more different—a reminder of the view of the historian Fernand Braudel that although France was centralised before any other continental country, France, as such, does not exist. One France is Catholic, one Protestant; one cooks with olive oil, one with butter; there is left-wing France and right-wing France (and elections often tend to result in 49/51 per cent); agricultural France and industrial France; northern and southern France... and there is Paris.

Bertrand Blier's *Tenue de Soirée* ('Dressing Up' would be my translation) belongs to the Parisian 'naughty' tradition. Blier, accused of being a misogynist ever since *Les Valseuses* a decade ago, has done it again, as it were. In fact, the idea for *Tenue de Soirée* came to him at the time of *Les Valseuses*, his original intention being once again to co-star Gérard Depardieu and Patrick Dewaere. The idea was dropped after Dewaere's suicide, but it wouldn't stay dropped. A year ago, Blier wrote a screenplay for Depardieu, playing the role of an active, not to say predatory, homosexual, with Bernard Girardeau (later replaced by Michel Blanc) as the object of his desire. Blanc is not, like Girardeau, a handsome young man, which makes Depardieu's passion for him all the more interesting: this is a film about love, and the less likely the object, the stronger the film.

The last twenty minutes of *Tenue de Soirée* disappointed almost everybody: clearly Blier just didn't know how to end his film, and the solution he chose was not perhaps the best. But no matter: his dialogue is superb, as was his choice of actors, including Miou-Miou as Blanc's ex-girlfriend. (Blier rejects the notion of

The Decline of the American Empire.



Cannes '86

'direction of actors': for him, once they are chosen that is that, and the rest is just a matter of giving advice when asked.) His film was expected to cause a *scandale* in Cannes; everyone, however, is now too blasé for that, and there was nothing compared with the outrage which in some, though by no means all, quarters greeted the award of the Palme d'Or to *The Mission* rather than to Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*. (Unhappily, I was unable to see the Puttnam/Joffé film, whose award was a final boost for British Film Year. Rushed to Cannes in unfinished form as 'work in progress', it will be reviewed in a later issue.)

Alain Cavalier's *Thérèse* won the Jury Prize, and to almost everyone's surprise was a kind of hit. Why the surprise? First, this is an example of the Catholic strain in French culture, which is not the most popular one with foreigners. Second, *Thérèse* is indeed St Theresa, though not the charismatic one from Avila but the sweet young thing from Lisieux in Normandy often known as Little Flower (1873-97), who was canonised in 1925 and is best known for her autobiography *The Story of a Soul*. The third reason for surprise was the director himself. Alain Cavalier has had a strange career, beginning in 1962 with *Le Combat dans l'île*, followed by only seven more films in almost a quarter of a century—and none of them, incidentally, had a religious theme. In fact, Cavalier says that he has no pretensions to being religious, but that he likes 'mysteries, mysticism and myths: whatever helps explain life, to bear it or change it.' In any event, and with the help of his radiant young actress Catherine Mouchet, straight from the Dramatic Conservatory, he has made a film which goes some way towards portraying *Thérèse's* inner life, her courage, her doubts and her vision of sanctity, and which has a genuinely exalting effect on the audience.

A third side of French culture—psychological analysis and the family romance—was provided by *Le Lieu du Crime* (*The Scene of the Crime*), André Téchiné's best film to date. Oddly, the first ten minutes were inspired by the opening of *Great Expectations*. A boy is

threatened by an escaped convict (in this case, a young and handsome one) who desperately needs food and money. And the boy duly gets it for him. From that point on, however, it is goodbye Dickens and hello Balzac, Flaubert, and even Proust.

Lilli (Catherine Deneuve), mother of the adolescent boy, is divorced from his father. She and her son live with her mother (Danielle Darrieux, no less), while Lilli earns her living by running a kind of country nightclub in southwest France. The boy is devoted to his mother, and vice versa, but when she meets the young criminal (Wadek Stanczak) she falls wildly and hopelessly in love with him. Not love so much as passion at first sight; and a passion which leads her to a desperate solution, not only for herself but for her son. Téchiné's film is beautifully made and scripted, but what mainly distinguishes it is the acting. Catherine Deneuve has done nothing as good since *The Last Metro*, and there's something particularly touching about her scenes with the imperishable Danielle Darrieux.

Two years ago, Jim Jarmusch's *Stranger than Paradise* was the hit of the Directors' Fortnight. More important, it went on to commercial success in several countries. This year, Jarmusch had *Down by Law* in competition and again scored highly. Once again, he has cast the extraordinary-looking John Lurie, this time with the singer and songwriter Tom Waits and, most spectacularly, Roberto Benigni, an Italian comedian and director, in his first English-language role. Set in New Orleans, the film brings together in a prison cell these three very different men, all outsiders of a sort. They soon escape in the bayou country, where at least one of them finds happiness, while the other two go their separate ways. It is a comedy, I suppose, but a rather dark one. Just as the title *Down by Law* signifies, in street slang, 'under control', whereas it would seem to indicate the opposite. But that fits the film, which Jarmusch has described as having both the strange symmetry of a fairytale and the implacable logic of an obsessive dream, and which has been shot in

masterly style by Robby Muller, Wenders' usual cameraman. After *Permanent Vacation*, *Stranger than Paradise* and now *Down by Law*, Jim Jarmusch is beginning to look like one of the important film-makers of the 1980s—and there are not so many of them.

But Spike Lee, who wrote, edited and directed *She's Gotta Have It* (shown in the Directors' Fortnight) might well become another. He is a black American film-maker, and all his characters—Nola, the girl who can't decide which of three lovers she really loves, plus the lesbian friend she is sure she doesn't—are also black. It's a very entertaining film (Lee himself plays the funniest of the three men); but its main point is the double standard by which male and female sexuality is judged.

A generally successful Cannes had its share of disappointments as well. Starting on the opening night with *Pirates*, Roman Polanski's first film since *Tess*. In the age of hijacking, pirate films no longer seem so appealing, and although this is a parody of a pirate film it's a laboured and limping one, which suffers from the strange miscasting of Walter Matthau. The best thing about *Pirates* was that the wooden ship, specially built for the film, was brought to Cannes and anchored in the Old Port. Better still, this gorgeous galleon will remain in Cannes, and open to the public, as a museum of the film.

A disappointment of a different kind came with the screening of forty minutes from Orson Welles' never finished *Don Quixote*. Both the Don and Sancho Panza are dubbed by Welles himself (both Akim Tamiroff/Sancho and Francisco Rieguera/Quixote having died during the shooting of the film). *Quixote* might have been a great film if Welles had ever been able to finish it, but in its very rough, unedited state it is of interest mainly to film students, and its screenings at Cannes seemed neither suitable nor useful. Oja Kodar told us that Welles himself never wanted to show it to anyone before it was finished. He was right. ■

Thérèse: Catherine Mouchet.

Down by Law: Tom Waits, John Lurie, Roberto Benigni.



The Invisible ORSON

All films today are unfinished—except, possibly, those of Bresson.

Raul Ruiz in conversation

You don't imagine that posterity's judgment, do you? Posterity is a whim. A shapeless litter of old bones: the midden of a vulgar beast: the most capricious and immense mass-public of them all—the dead.

Kim Menaker in *The Big Brass Ring*

It seems typical of the misunderstandings which plagued Orson Welles' life that he died, as a working artist, in almost total obscurity. The director of *Citizen Kane*, to be sure, taped a lengthy tv talk-show appearance the day before he died which summarised a substantial portion of his career—as magician, actor, director, one-time political aspirant, show-biz personality and, most recently, the subject of a biography by Barbara Leaming. Yet such is the nature of our media and its discreet omissions that this generous glimpse of Welles failed even to hint at the artistic activity that consumed the last two decades of his life. The closest the programme got to this reality was a passing acknowledgment of *Chimes at Midnight*, released in 1966, as an unjustly neglected film.

It's an unpleasant but unavoidable fact that according to the logic of capitalism, which tends to define reality exclusively in relation to marketable items, Welles as an artist died in disgrace—the butt of endless fat jokes, has-been references, and morose reflections about what would or could or should have been had the man not gone so distressingly to seed. This wasn't, of course, the general response outside the US; in Paris, to cite the other extreme, only two days after his death by heart attack on 10 October 1985, *Libération* came out with a twelve-page tribute. But, by and large, the American response was remorseless in its verdict. Decline, failure, inactivity, endless 'taking meals' at Ma Maison in Los Angeles and hack tv appearances by a one-time genius were mostly what one read about, often with a reference to

A FIRST INVENTORY JONATHAN ROSENBAUM



Orson Welles filming *The Other Side of the Wind*. Photo: J. M. Castellvi.

WELLES

Pauline Kael's pejorative 'Raising Kane' thrown in for good measure.

Why was Welles hated and feared so much on his native soil? Was it because he was perceived as the man who had it all, and then threw it away? But of course Welles never had it all to begin with; despite the strength of his original RKO contract, only one of his many projects there ever got made and released to his satisfaction, and that one came dangerously close to never getting made or released at all. The legend embraced the boy wonder in power, but fell aground as soon as it had to cope with him as deposed royalty—which is what he remained for the next forty-five years. For the most part, critics and public alike remained loftily indifferent to this second Welles, at least until it was too late to make any difference: if it wasn't another *Citizen Kane*, made with the virtually limitless resources of a major studio and released by a major distributor, they weren't interested—until the film was revived as a classic a decade or so later.

Considering the brashness of Welles, it would be foolish to claim that he was entirely blameless in what happened, yet no less foolish to assume that he should somehow have tempered his brashness in order to stay in the game. (He tried that in *The Stranger*, and only an anti-Wellesian like James Agee could have been very pleased with the results.) And it is important to remember that he was brash as an artist, not as a celebrity or public figure; he never shocked anyone on a TV show—which is perhaps part of what made the periodic need to shock in his art so palpable. *Touch of Evil*, *The Trial* and (as scripted) *The Big Brass Ring* are all like the volcanic eruptions of a caged beast kept too long in confinement—excessive at times to the point of losing control over their own meanings, yet richer and more thrilling for the headlong risks they take.

If Welles, along with Murnau, was the most poetically gifted master of camera movement in the history of cinema, this was largely because he wasn't a rationalist like Mizoguchi or even Ophüls in his charted arabesques and flourishes, but an explorer of unconscious and semi-conscious drives and transports. The bravura of the descent into and eventual

ascent away from the El Rancho; the giddy, fleeting entrance into the last of the Amberson balls; the almost prenatal backward probe down a dark courtyard passageway, away from Van Stratten on his way up the stairs through the snow towards Jacob Zouk; the swoops and dives of a crane across a Mexican border town, or the serpentine chase around the pillars of a ruined building outside a stripjoint—always the elation of a Victorian imagination run riot.

Significantly, at a tribute to Welles held at the Directors Guild in Hollywood last November, Charlton Heston described Welles as the most gifted director he ever worked for, but demurred when Peter Bogdanovich labelled *Touch of Evil* (1958), Welles' last Hollywood film, 'a masterpiece'. Heston said that he preferred to call it 'the best B picture ever made.' In America, to make the best B picture ever made means, on the bottom line, to 'be a failure; acutely aware of this fact, even as he railed against it, Welles could not transform himself into a mainstream figure, and wound up subsidising most of his late work himself. Quite simply, to 'succeed' in the 80s, he would have to have been someone else.

and assessed. In the meantime, a certain amount of clarification seems both possible and desirable. Even the fragmentary evidence already becoming available suggests a different Welles from the one we have become accustomed to calling our own, and clearly this is as it should be: was there ever a film in his career that *didn't* confound our expectations? And for starters, it is now evident that Welles continued to produce for half a century at very nearly the same alarming rate which he had sustained in his youth, however and whenever he could. It was only the rest of us who had slowed down.

Indeed, one could argue that it was precisely this non-stop production which aborted Welles' career and led to so many unfinished, unrealised and/or invisible projects—to the same degree that it yielded the substantial (if partially mangled) *oeuvre* which we already know. Living on the wire, Welles saw life and work alike as a treacherous balancing act requiring constant improvisation, meaning that no script, however elaborate, could be simply executed, and no footage, however successful, could be simply edited—a style of work which sent chills up investors' spines, but one not incompatible with the ordinary working methods of many painters, composers and novelists. The resulting martyrdom has usually been rationalised in one of two ways, neatly summed up by the two Welles biographies which appeared last year: either by blaming everything on Welles (the Charles Higham formula) or by blaming fate or the world (only a slight exaggeration of Barbara Leaming's approach). Surely the fact that Welles' subjective private world tended to be split between fidelity and betrayal only added to this polarisation. But the truth has to be somewhere in between, and no single or simple Rosebud can be produced satisfactorily to dissolve the dilemma. Perhaps it isn't a dilemma that *should* be dissolved; perhaps, on the contrary, it is the peculiar strength of Welles' work to keep it alive and worrying—a continuing rebuke and challenge to the way the world usually goes about its business.

In love with process rather than product, Welles triumphed as well as

suffered by postponing deadlines; it is worth recalling that the most celebrated works of his career—*Julius Caesar* on stage, *The War of the Worlds* on radio, *Citizen Kane* on film—all thrived on last-minute delays and revisions. The only thing that changed, really, was our tolerance for such activity, and the loss is mainly ours. Welles, after all, had a thousand and one Welles films in his head and at his disposal; we only have the ones we allowed him to make.

In the latter part of his film career, Welles took a dramatic turn towards privacy that makes many of his late works more intimate and personal and less tied to his public image than the earlier ones. As an integral part of that life and work, the figure of Oja Kodar is likely to disconcert many of those Welles aficionados who assume that they had the master all figured out years ago. Until very recently, she has remained a willing stranger to the world of cinema, and apart from her appearance in *F for Fake*, unknown to most of Welles' audience. Yet insofar as there is an invisible Orson Welles to contend with, she is clearly, along with cinematographer Gary Graver, a major collaborator, witness and resource.

A Yugoslav sculptor who met Welles in Zagreb during the shooting of *The Trial* in 1962, and lived with him for the better part of the last two decades of his life, she worked on at least a dozen of his late features and projects—beginning with the dubbing of Jeanne Moreau's lovemaking sighs in *The Immortal Story* and proceeding through a major part in *The Deep*, script collaboration and lead parts in *F for Fake* and *The Other Side of the Wind* (films whose titles are incidentally hers), work on many other scripts (including *The Honorary Consul*, *The Surinam*, *A Hell of a Woman*, *The Big Brass Ring* and *The Dreamers*) and some projected or semi-realised parts (Pellegrina, the lead role in *The Dreamers*; Cela Brandini in *The Big Brass Ring*; Cordelia in *Lear*). Apart from this, she assumed such varying tasks as props and wardrobe on *F for Fake*, assistant director on *The Magic Show*, and everything from slate holder to focus puller on still other projects.

The Welles legacy, such as it is, consists of works in different forms and different stages of realisation and completion, ranging all the way from scripts to finished films. Most of the films require lab and/or restoration work before they can be seen at all, and when this will happen depends on several factors, most of them legal and/or financial. Omitted from the inventory below, the order of which is roughly chronological (and often misleadingly so, for many projects were worked on concurrently), are several late projects or scripts about which I know little beyond their titles or subjects: adaptations of *Catch-22*, Conrad's *Lord Jim* and *Victory* (the latter of which, entitled *The Surinam*, Bogdanovich once planned to produce), Greene's *The Honorary Consul* (co-scripted by Kodar), Jim Thompson's

A Hell of a Woman (co-scripted by Kodar and Gary Graver); films about Chaplin, San Simeon and Central America; and a couple of Kodar stories, *Blind Window* and *Crazy Weather*—not to mention the twenty or so earlier scripts listed in an appendix to Peter Cowie's *The Cinema of Orson Welles*, as well as other titles which we may both have missed.

One further caveat. In what is conceivably the last draft of Welles' script for *The Magnificent Ambersons* before shooting started, dated 7 October 1941, one encounters the following:

THE MIDDLE-AGED CITIZEN

Sixty thousand dollars for the woodwork *alone*! Yes, sir—hot and cold running water upstairs and down, and stationary washstands in every last bedroom in the place!

Pretty much the same dialogue occurs in the film, but split between no less than four gawking townspeople, two men and two women. A small change, perhaps, but rhythmically and musically a crucial one in terms of the line's delivery and impact, and only one of the countless examples of Welles' creativity on a set. Bearing this in mind, it is impossible to read any of his unrealised scripts and confidently imagine that one can conjure up the film that would have been from the printed evidence. Yet the remarkable thing about the scripts I've read for *The Cradle Will Rock* and *The Big Brass Ring*—unlike the first and ninth drafts of *The Dreamers*, which leave more to the imagination—is that they often register like living, breathing and finished works on the page, almost as if Welles had suspected that they might never be allowed to live elsewhere. As such, they virtually cry out to be published, and one hopes eventually they will be.

It's All True. Although much has already been written about this doomed Latin American venture of 1942, including articles by Charles Higham and Richard Wilson in this magazine, a

considerable portion of the unprocessed and unedited silent footage had not until very recently been seen by anyone. In *Cahiers du Cinéma* last autumn, Bill Krohn reported at some length on the tortuous history of this episodic documentary and its partially recovered footage. Since then, Richard Wilson and Paramount executive Fred Chandler have been working on a documentary about *It's All True* which will incorporate much of the available footage, primarily a version of the jangadeiros episode edited by Wilson, as well as interviews with some of the surviving participants on the project.

While hardly any of the three-strip Technicolor carnival sequences appears to have survived (unlike much of the black and white coverage of the same events), the most important material to have been uncovered this year is said to be the footage shot in Fortaleza with a silent Mitchell camera and a skeleton crew of four (Wilson and his wife Elizabeth, cameraman George Fanto and Welles' secretary Shifra Haran) during Welles' last six weeks in Brazil, which Krohn finds comparable in some respects to Eisenstein's *Que Viva Mexico!* rushes. (Whether Welles would have appreciated the comparison is doubtful; according to Kodar, whose anticinéphilia runs as deeply as Welles' did, my own suggestion that the beginning of *Othello* is Eisensteinian wouldn't have pleased him either.)

Moby-Dick. A few sources cite a film made of Welles' celebrated 1955 stage version of Melville's novel, done in the form of a stage rehearsal, at London's Hackney Empire and Scala Theatre. According to some reports, the film was never finished. Kodar has recently uncovered three very old and fragile reels of 16mm footage labelled *Moby-Dick*; if this is in fact the material, we can perhaps look forward to a unique film record of Welles' stage work.

Life of Lollobrigida. In my translation of André Bazin's second book about Welles (Elm Tree Books, 1978), I said in a footnote that this tv film was never completed. But according to Jean-Pierre Thibaudat in *Libération* last February, three more mouldering reels comprising a half-hour personal 'essay' by Welles about Lollobrigida have recently surfaced in Paris. The story recounted by Thibaudat is quintessentially Wellesian. Circa 1958, probably on his way back from Rome, Welles stopped off at one of his favourite hotels in Paris, and left the film cans behind when he departed. As the canisters bore no name or address, they wound up in the hotel's lost property department, were never reclaimed, and were eventually transferred to another storage area, where they remained for a further two decades.

The film was made for CBS and, according to Welles in a 1982 interview, 'sent to them, where there were cries of horror and disgust from [James] Aubrey there, whose nickname you remember was "The Smiling Cobra". And that was the end of that.' Apparently done in a



Welles during the production of *The Other Side of the Wind*. Photo: J. M. Castellvi.

manner that anticipates *F for Fake* and *Filming Othello* (as well as some of Fellini's film journals), the film has Welles ruminating on other Italian stars, pin-ups and Rome, speaking on-screen and off over Steinberg drawings and Italian landscapes, including brief encounters with his wife Paola Mori, and with Rosanno Brazzi and Vittorio De Sica, and finally visiting Lollobrigida in her native village (Subiaco) in the third reel, after being greeted by her three wolfhounds at the door.

Don Quixote, aka *When Will You Finish Don Quixote?* The film with the longest production history in Welles' career, this adaptation of Cervantes' novel in a modern setting, financed entirely out of Welles' own pocket, was worked on intermittently for thirty years. He started it in France in 1955, with Mischa Auer as Quixote and Akim Tamiroff as Sancho Panza, continued it in Mexico over three months in 1957 (replacing Auer with Francisco Rieguera), and added further material (shot in Mexico, Spain and Italy) in the 60s and early 70s, the last of which was footage of the Holy Week Processions in Seville, shot by Graver. He edited a more or less complete version in Rome in the mid-70s, and shortly before his death had the workprint shipped to Los Angeles, planning to discard the film's original framing device (Welles, as himself, telling the story to a young Patty McCormack) and add a colour prologue and epilogue—work which was never completed.

The film is currently in the process of being restored. When it finally becomes visible, one wonders to what degree it will reflect the varying conceptions Welles had of it as he progressively developed the project. According to Bazin, the original material shot in Mexico followed 'a principle of complete improvisation inspired by the early cinema.' Kodar reports that Welles, apart from supplying the narration, dubbed the voices of both Don Quixote and Sancho Panza. At one point in the early 80s, Welles hoped to return to Spain and add material about changes since the death of Franco, giving the film more of an essay form. It would appear that part of his reluctance to conclude the project stemmed from his changing attitudes towards Spain, where he lived for many years during the 50s (and which is the principal setting of *The Big Brass Ring*). Dominique Antoine, the French co-producer of *The Other Side of the Wind*, recalls that he once told her he could finish *Don Quixote* only if he ever decided *not* to go back to Spain—apparently because each return visit suggested further revisions.

The Deep. Not to be confused with Peter Yates' 1977 feature of the same title, this adaptation of Charles Williams' thriller *Dead Calm*, scripted by Welles, was shot in colour off the Dalmatian coast at Hvar, Yugoslavia between 1967 and 1969, with Welles, Laurence Harvey, Jeanne Moreau, Oja Kodar and Michael Bryant. Most of this film was shot and edited, but gaps remain due to the death

of Laurence Harvey in 1973 and the still undubbed part of Jeanne Moreau. Welles, Kodar and others have regarded this as the least of his features, so one imagines that it has a low priority on the list of works to be completed and/or released—although, as Kodar points out, priorities may change on any project if investment is forthcoming.

At the Rotterdam Film Festival last January, Kodar, Dominique Antoine and I compiled a 90-minute videotape of Wellesiana to be shown there, and among the clips we included was a two-minute trailer for *The Deep*—an early action sequence including brief glimpses of all five of the characters on two yachts and an effective use of percussive jazz (bass and drums) on the soundtrack. Crisply if rather conventionally edited, it does not suggest major Welles, although a look at Williams' novel suggests an intriguing tension between the characters of Hughie Warriner (Harvey), a psychotic hijacker, and Russ Brewer (Welles), an acerbic macho writer, which in some ways parallels the charged relationships between older and younger men in *Chimes at Midnight*, *The Other Side of the Wind* and *The Big Brass Ring*. (If the theme of mothers and sons seems to inform the early features—*Kane*, *Ambersons*, *The Lady from Shanghai*, *Macbeth*—the emphasis on fathers and sons seems no less prevalent in some of the later projects.)

The Merchant of Venice. The most unknown of all Welles' invisible features, shot in colour (by Giorgio Tonti, Ivica



F for Fake: Welles and Oja Kodar.

Rajkovic and Tomislav Pinter) in Trogir, Yugoslavia, Asolo, Italy (the villa of Eleonora Duse) and Venice in 1969. The film was completed—edited, scored and mixed—over fifteen years ago but has not yet seen the light of day because two of the workprint reels, including the sound elements (which are now missing from the original negative) were stolen from the production office in Rome.

The last of Welles' realised film adaptations of Shakespeare, featuring himself as Shylock, Charles Gray as Antonio and Irina Maleva as Jessica, it is set in the 18th century and, according to Kodar, reflects Welles' interest in Judaism, as well as his belief that the play is neither anti- nor pro-semitic. 'It's impossible to believe that [Shakespeare] didn't know Jews,' Welles told Bill Krohn in 1982, during the interview in which he first acknowledged the film's existence. 'And there were few of them in England at the time. But there was the theory that he'd been in the Low Countries and doing military service, and it would have been there that he'd run into a lot of Jewish people. Because the rhythms of speech are so Jewish.' (It is worth noting that in *The Dreamers* Welles also cast himself in an explicitly Jewish role.)

Welles originally wanted Kodar to play Portia, but she refused, at that stage considering her English inadequate, and Welles wound up eliminating Portia from the story altogether—a startling move, but one not inconsistent with some of his other drastic changes in Shakespeare throughout his career. One of the segments planned for *Orson Welles Solo* was an abridged one-man performance of *Julius Caesar* eliminating Brutus!

The *F for Fake* Trailer. Before the disastrous American release of Welles' 1973 feature (but after its successful run in Europe), he filmed a promotional trailer with completely new material, featuring Kodar and Gary Graver.

Because the film runs about a dozen minutes, the American distributor indignantly refused to process it; it remains in black and white workprint form, with sound and image on separate reels, and was shown in that form at a Welles tribute in Los Angeles a few years ago.

The Other Side of the Wind. If *Don Quixote* has the longest production history, this colour and black and white feature, prefigured to run about three hours, has certainly had the most complex and nightmarish vicissitudes; Kodar has remarked that the correspondence file alone is as long as *War and Peace*. (See the lengthy account in Leaming's biography, which co-producer Antoine informs me is entirely accurate.) Started well before *F for Fake*, in 1970, and continued for years afterwards, in Arizona, Los Angeles and elsewhere, the film was very nearly completed: Antoine recalls Welles putting together a rough cut with the aid of no less than eleven movieolas, arranged in a semi-circle. But for the last decade it has remained, unseen, either in the possession of the brother-in-law of the late Shah of Iran or in the French courts, where Kodar is trying to retrieve it, hoping to complete it with the assistance of Graver (who shot the entire film and worked on the editing) and Peter Bogdanovich. From all accounts, it would appear to be both Welles' last satiric word on the world of cinema and one of his most adventurous stylistic experiments.

'When we started writing the script,' Kodar says, 'we had two stories. Orson's was called *Jake Hannaford* and it was too long, because it was based on the life of movie director Rex Ingram, and on Hemingway following the bullfights through Spain, and on some of Orson's own experiences. Orson came to the conclusion that the bullfights had become just a tourist attraction and had lost whatever sincerity they once had.

'So after he discovered his script was too long, and cut everything he wanted to cut, he discovered it was too short. This is how we decided to make a sort of osmosis of his story and my story, and began working together on a new script. My story is that there is a man who is still potent—it's not that he is impotent—but gets a real kick from the idea of sleeping with his leading man, sleeping really with the woman of his leading man. So he is not a classic homosexual, but somewhere in his mind he is possessing that man by possessing his woman. And at the same time, just because there is a hidden homosexuality in him, he is very rough on open homosexuals, as so many of those guys are.

'This is one reason why the script is so complicated and has so many chords. When you see the film, you will feel that somebody else worked with him because there are things that he never would have done alone, and never did before. He was a very shy man, and erotic stuff was not his thing. And in this film, you will see the erotic stuff. He kept accusing me with his finger: "It's your fault!" And he was right—it's my fault!'

Part of this film's formal interest is that it incorporates two separate styles, neither of which can be associated with Welles' customary signature (apart from the almost subliminally rapid editing which characterises his 'late' manner from *Othello* to portions of *The Trial* to *F for Fake*). One style belongs to an unfinished, rather arty film which Jake Hannaford (John Huston) is screening at his birthday party; the other derives from the diverse 16mm, Super-8 and video footage being shot by several tv and documentary crews at the party.

Centred round the night of 2 July (which, Joseph McBride has noted, 'is not coincidentally the date of Hemingway's suicide'), and reportedly employing a somewhat *Kane*-like flashback structure, the film features tv actor Bob Random as Hannaford's leading man, Kodar as his leading actress, Lilli Palmer as the friend giving the party, Peter Bogdanovich as a younger director (patterned in part after Bogdanovich himself) and, among others, Norman Foster, Curtis Harrington, Henry Jaglom, Joseph McBride, Mercedes McCambridge, Paul Mazursky, Cameron Mitchell, Edmond O'Brien, Paul Stewart, Susan Strasberg, Dan Tobin and Richard Wilson. Two excerpts from the film—both witty and frenetic—were shown by Welles at the AFI's Life Achievement Award banquet held in his honour in 1975, in an unsuccessful attempt to raise completion money, and these are described in some detail in the closing pages of James Naremore's excellent *The Magic World of Orson Welles*. Which affords us a match cut to

The Magic Show. Shot intermittently between 1969 and 1985 with Graver, Kodar and fellow magician Ab Dickson, in Los Angeles, Atlanta and Kodar's home in Orvilliers, France, this is the project Welles was working on when he died. The centrepiece of this theatrical

smorgasbord, which seems to bear some resemblances to Tati's *Parade*, is an assortment of some of his best acts of prestidigitation, all done without camera tricks. According to Graver, this portion of the programme runs about half an hour and is more or less edited.

The remainder consists of *The Orson Welles Special*, completed, a 90-minute talk-show with Burt Reynolds, Angie Dickinson and the Muppets; and *Orson Welles Solo*, scripted but regrettably unrealised, which Welles wanted to shoot partially with a Betacam—a one-man show that would have included the abridged *Julius Caesar* without Brutus and the telling of an Isak Dinesen story, 'The Old Chevalier', which Welles had originally planned to include as part of a sketch feature for Alexander Korda in the 1950s, *Paris by Night*. Other cast members in *The Magic Show* as a whole include Senta Berger, Artie Johnson, Lynn Redgrave, Mickey Rooney (whom Welles once expressed an interest in casting as the Fool in *King Lear*) and restaurateur Patrick Terrail.

The Big Brass Ring. Although this project never got beyond the script stage, it is unquestionably one of the most remarkable and revealing works in the entire Welles canon. Written at the urging of his friend director Henry Jaglom, ostensibly as a 'commercial' Hollywood screenplay, it is in fact nothing of the sort—though no less brilliant for that. The settings are New York, a yacht in the Mediterranean, North Africa, Barcelona and Madrid. Senator Blake Pellarin, a Texas Democrat, has just lost out to Reagan in a presidential election, to the bitter disappointment of his ambitious wife Diana. On a yachting trip, he spies a Portuguese maid about to steal his wife's emerald necklace and impulsively urges her to take it. Then, even more impulsively, he offers to find her a fence for it, snatches it back, and sets off on a wild goose chase leading him to his beloved Harvard mentor Kimball Menaker (Welles), holed up at the Batunga Hilton with a sickly, dying pet monkey and two black, nude female bodyguards.

Having thus in effect gone AWOL from his wife and political entourage, Pellarin asks for Menaker's help in fencing the necklace, which eventually leads to secret meetings between the two in Madrid. As the story shuttles in Arkadin-like fashion between Pellarin, wife and entourage, and Menaker, and their occasionally parallel trajectories, the major go-between is Cela Brandini, a jet-set journalist in army fatigues clearly patterned after Oriana Fallaci. Rather like the faceless reporter in *Kane*, she probes the painful half-secret that has helped to undo Pellarin's political career and continues to bind him to Menaker—the fact that Menaker, once a prized member of F.D.R.'s brains trust, has belatedly come out of the closet and, in a letter to his former lover, now a basket-case casualty from Vietnam, declared his love and lust for Pellarin.

The above barely summarises the plot's point of departure, but cannot begin to do justice to the manic energy of this demonic, tragicomic thriller, which Welles hoped to shoot in black and white. (Most of the members of Pellarin's entourage are comic grotesques worthy of the Grandi clan and night watchman in *Touch of Evil*.) Shortly after Welles' death, Jaglom complained bitterly to the *Los Angeles Times* about the circumstances which sank the project. Producer Arnon Milchan agreed to put up the money if Jaglom and Welles could find a bankable star to play Pellarin for two million dollars, but all seven of the stars who were approached—including Warren Beatty, Clint Eastwood, Jack Nicholson, Robert Redford and Burt Reynolds—turned them down, each for a different reason.

The script manages to convey complex feelings about Spain since the Civil War and the US from the New Deal to Watergate, as well as a Goyaesque view of powerless and helpless suffering (which 'rhymes' Menaker's pet monkey with a blind beggar whom Pellarin kicks to death), and a delirious depiction of sexuality which comes to the fore in Pellarin's reunion with a former Vietnamese mistress (another contribution by Kodar of 'erotic stuff'). Overall, the plot gradually develops from a kind of bouncy naturalism to a nightmarish phantasmagoria, before returning to mischievous comedy. It is clearly too advanced, too sophisticated and too candidly personal for anything that Hollywood in the 80s could begin to handle, much less imagine. Forty years earlier, Welles had RKO and all its resources at his disposal; with a fraction as much today, he might well have come up with a feature just as startling.

The Cradle Will Rock. Like *Touch of Evil*, this was a project not initiated by Welles, but one which he was able to take over after it had been developed separately—in this case, scripted by Ring Lardner Jr for producer Michael Fitzgerald. According to Kodar, Welles' version of the script, written during the fall of 1984, was entirely original.

The Other Side of the Wind: John Huston. Photo: J. M. Castellvi.



Set in New York City and environs in 1937, *The Cradle Will Rock* depicts Welles' life and career at the age of twenty-two: performing *Dr Faustus* on Broadway, meeting composer Marc Blitzstein and launching his leftist musical *The Cradle Will Rock*, and meanwhile performing weekly on radio shows ranging from *The Shadow* to soap operas to *The March of Time*, proceeding from one studio to the next in a rented ambulance. The plot is candid enough to comment on some of the problems in Welles' first marriage as well as his ambivalent relation to Blitzstein's radical politics. Members of the Mercury Theatre such as John Houseman, Augusta Weissberger, black actor Jack Carter and Welles' first wife Virginia Nicholson figure prominently; and the script begins with Welles himself as narrator, succinctly evoking the mood of the Depression of the mid-30s.

After Welles cast Rupert Everett as the young Welles and Amy Irving as Virginia, sets were constructed at Cinecittà in Rome and exterior locations selected in New York and Los Angeles; but three weeks before shooting was scheduled to begin, the budget evaporated after some difficulties between the investors. Tragically, not even Steven Spielberg, Amy Irving's husband, who once paid a princely sum to purchase one of the original Rosebud sleds, was willing to lift a finger to save the project. Apparently Fitzgerald is still interested in filming Welles' script, with another director. A fascinating and highly critical self-portrait, it tells a lively story whose interest goes well beyond its autobiographical aspects in its nostalgic evocations of the period.

Whether a film of the script could overcome the problem of casting young actors as Welles, Agnes Moorehead and other Mercury figures without alienating older viewers remains an open question (Welles himself was apparently concerned about this issue). But for any reader of the script who can fill in the names with the appropriate faces, it remains an exciting and crucial document—possibly the most extensive exercise in literal self-scrutiny that Welles has given us. And considering the over 40-year feud between Welles and John Houseman, it is worth noting that Welles' depiction of his Mercury producer is in fact rather benign; the script even paraphrases Houseman's description of Welles as a Faustian obsessive in his memoir *Run-through*—a view hotly contested in Leaming's Welles biography.

King Lear. I haven't read Welles' screenplay for the last of his projected adaptations of Shakespeare, which he planned to shoot in black and white, with himself as Lear, Kodar as Cordelia and Ab Dickson (the magician in *The Magic Show*) as the Fool. But going by Kodar's description, it is a good deal more detailed than the other scripts which I have read—indicating every move of the camera and actors, and supplemented by many drawings for the costumes and



Welles in ABC TV's *Tempo* profile.

constructed models for the sets. And Welles' proposal for *Lear* in the form of a six-minute videotape, shown in Rotterdam last January, gives provocative and tantalising clues about the form and style that his film would take.

After powerfully evoking the play's theme of old age, he begins to describe what the film *won't* be like. It will not, he promises, be 'what is called a costume movie' in any sense of the word. 'That doesn't mean that the characters are going to wear blue jeans; it *does* mean that a story so sharply modern in its relevancy, so universal in its simple, rock-bottom humanity, will not be burdened with the time-worn baggage of theatrical tradition. It will be just as free from the various forms of cinematic rhetoric, my own as well as the others, which have already accumulated in the history of these translations of Shakespeare into film. What we'll be giving you, then, is something new: Shakespeare addressed directly and uniquely to the sensibility of our own particular day. The camera language will be intimate, extremely intimate, rather than grandiose. The tone will be at once epic in its stark simplicity and almost ferociously down to earth. In a word, not only a new kind of Shakespeare, but a new kind of film.' Conceived of largely in closeups, Welles' *Lear*, one imagines, would have been a logical successor to *Chimes at Midnight*.

Although *Lear* was ostensibly to have been financed by French television, Kodar firmly believes—as did Welles—that they never sincerely intended to make the film. Speaking in a barely controlled rage at the Directors Guild tribute to Welles last November, she read a cable of condolence from François Mitterrand stating that Welles 'may not have been able or may not have wanted to have followed to an end this film.' 'I am sorry,' Kodar then remarked, 'that M Mitterrand, even at this sad hour, has had to play politics and defend his establishment . . . Who would be the best person to help French Minister of Culture Jack Lang to take his foot out of his mouth for openly declaring his dislike and disdain for existing imperialism

of nonexistent American culture? Who else? Welles.'

Speaking of an artificially inflated budget, impossible production conditions and broken promises, Kodar read the last part of Welles' own message to Paris in May 1985: 'In the fifty-five years of my professional career I have never, not even in the worst days of the old Hollywood, encountered such a humiliating inflexibility. Need I say that this is a bitter disappointment to one who has until now received so much heart-warming and generous cooperation in France. To my profound regret, therefore, I must accept that your own last Telex is the last word about *Lear* and that there is no longer any hope that in this affair a constructive relationship is possible.'

Despite this loss of finance, Welles continued to hope to make the film by other means, and had himself photographed in his *Lear* costume and make-up shortly before his death.

The Dreamers. 'The last of Orson's dreams,' Kodar describes this colour adaptation of two Isak Dinesen stories, worked on between 1978 and 1985. While trying unsuccessfully to raise money for this project, Welles shot various tests and a few scenes, totalling about twenty minutes, in and around the house he shared in Hollywood with Kodar, with Graver as cinematographer and Kodar in the lead part of Pellegrina—an opera singer who, having lost her voice, decides to live many other lives. In the first story, 'The Dreamers', three men who have fallen in love with her—a young Englishman, a Danish cavalry officer and a young American—converge on an inn, each in search of her, and during a blizzard pass the time by telling one another about their affairs with this elusive woman, only gradually discovering that they are all in pursuit of the same person. In the second story, 'Echoes', Pellegrina arrives in a remote mountain village and, in a church, encounters a young boy named Emmanuele whose singing voice seems identical to the voice she once had. She proceeds to give the boy voice lessons and falls in love with him, until he denounces her as a witch.

In the earliest version of the script, entitled 'Da Capo', Welles introduces the film by speaking of his lifelong infatuation with Dinesen's work. In the last version, the introduction is given over to Warren Beatty, who introduces Welles, who introduces in turn Lincoln Forsner, the young Englishman in search of Pellegrina—who is himself only the first of many narrators in Welles' intricate Chinese box structure of tales within tales.

Probably the most romantic of Welles' late projects, *The Dreamers* would almost surely have embodied his most exquisite and developed use of colour. Over two years in Madrid, still photographer José Maria Castellvi worked as Welles' 'colour scout' by photographing precise changes in the colours of the leaves in a park at different times of day

and recording the time and date of each photograph, all in preparation for sequences to be shot in Spain. (Shortly before Welles' death, Castellvi told me, a trunk arrived containing all the costumes to be worn by Kodar.)

A three-minute scene filmed in 1982 in Welles and Kodar's backyard in Hollywood, describing Pellegrina's departure from her life as a famous opera singer, represents as much of a quantum leap from *The Immortal Story*, Welles' previous Dinesen adaptation, as *Othello* does from *Macbeth*. Admittedly, the scene is no more than an unfinished fragment: Welles never got round to shooting his own close-ups (in the part of Marcus Kleek, the elderly Dutch Jewish merchant who is Pellegrina's only friend), and the dialogue—a lovely duet of two melodious, accented voices, accompanied by the whir of crickets and even the faint hum of passing traffic—is recorded in direct sound. But the delicate lighting, lyrical camera movement and rich deployments of blue, black and yellow, combined with the lilt of the two voices, create an astonishing glimpse into the overripe dream world that Welles envisioned for the film.

As suggested earlier, the above list is far from exhaustive; but clearly it is more than enough to vindicate Welles from the charge of idleness in his late years. The range of the work is as remarkable as the breadth, and the fact that virtually all this legacy has remained buried gives the film industry and media a lot to answer for. But a tentative hypothesis or two about how this happened might help to shed some partial light.

A man who was deeply moved when he was once recognised as Falstaff (rather than as Orson Welles) by a driver on the Champs-Élysées, Welles felt he belonged

more to the public than to the film specialist. After the fame that carried him through his mid-twenties, conceivably the most galling aspect of his subsequent career was the lack of a clear mainstream success. The only time that I met him, in 1972—having unexpectedly been invited to lunch by him in Paris two days after writing a modest letter of inquiry about *Heart of Darkness*, his first feature film project—I was surprised to hear him say that he was reluctant to release *Don Quixote* then because he didn't want it to compete with *Man of La Mancha*. No less surprising was the discovery that not even the earliest of his film dreams, *Heart of Darkness*, was regarded by him as abandoned; he still nurtured hopes of making it one day. Yet as the projects accumulated and the investments dwindled, he steadily refused to accept the status of a marginal artist—a decision which undoubtedly spurred his creative activity at the same time that it edged him further and further away from the mainstream, except as an entertainer.

Thus, even while his work grew more inward and self-reflective in its resonance for Welles fans—with characters as diverse as Russ Brewer, Don Quixote, Shylock, Hannaford, Pellarin, Menaker, Lear, Pellegrina and Kleek all taking their places beside the direct self-portraits in *F for Fake*, *Filming Othello* and *The Cradle Will Rock*—the conscious address grew ever more expansive and generous in its appeal to the general public. This discrepancy may finally have less to do with Welles than with the shrinking and diminishing culture around him; but whatever its source, it could only be judged one way while he was alive—as creative blockage. Ironically, now that he is dead, the floodgates can open; demonstrating once

again that what a culture wants of an artist at any given moment may at best be only incidental to the range of his or her talents.

As we know now from Leaming and Higham, Welles grew up trying to please parents who were diametrically opposed and eventually became estranged from one another, both of whom expected him to be entertaining and 'grown up'. Considering how well he succeeded with both of them, it is scarcely surprising that he extended these talents to the outside world, which initially rewarded him no less handsomely for his deceptions. Like Pellegrina, he became more than the sum of his roles, even if his public career afforded him less than the sum of his reputation.

With this background in mind, the standard objections to Welles' 'character' remind one of René Clair's fatherly advice to Preston Sturges, cited and admirably glossed by Manny Farber and W. S. Poster: 'Preston is like a man from the Italian Renaissance: he wants to do everything at once. If he could slow down, he would be great; he has an enormous gift, and he should be one of our leading creators. I wish he would be a little more selfish and worry about his reputation.' 'What Clair is suggesting,' note Farber and Poster, 'is that Sturges would be considerably improved if he annihilated himself.' This is more or less what we tended to expect from Welles, and although it took him the better part of seventy years, he finally obliged us. ■

There are only two things it is ever seemly for an intelligent person to be thinking... One is: 'What did God mean by creating the world?' And the other? 'What do I do next...?'

the end of *The Dreamers*

Orson Welles, Fellow of the British Film Institute, at the 1983 Guildhall banquet. Photo: Sten M. Rosenlund.



NO COUNTRY in the world produces more films than India—it was over 800 a year at the most recent count and in 23 different languages. Yet Indian film culture has hardly ever been adequately discussed in the West. And even in India itself there is only a handful of books and periodicals which address themselves coherently either to Indian film history or to what is actually happening now. Conventional wisdom has it that ninety per cent of India's film output is not worth looking at, and that the other ten per cent is dominated by once-off talents like Ritwik Ghatak, Satyajit Ray and Mrinal Sen. Yet even a cursory glance at some of the retrospectives mounted at recent Indian festivals would suggest that this attitude needs re-examination, at home as well as abroad.

In fact, since its very earliest days when a Lumière emissary demonstrated the new invention at Watson's Hotel, Bombay, in 1896, the Indian cinema has attracted artists and craftsmen of undeniable stature, from Dadasaheb Phalke, who in 1912 made *Raja Harishchandra*, the first Indian feature, right through to those few names Westerners now know from the festival circuit. And it would certainly be true to say that those we do recognise now, though in many ways pioneers, did not spring up from a morass of mediocrity but found the roots of their art as much within their own cinematic traditions as by looking to the West for inspiration. Even today, the Indian cinema's extraordinary story is only beginning to be charted within the subcontinent itself, and the often highly artificial battle-lines drawn up in front of the 'commercial' and 'artistic' wings of the film community still continue to prevent much meaningful debate or interaction.

In part, of course, the sheer scale of the task involved in making sense of Indian film history is inhibiting. India has been one of the four top film producing countries since 1930; vast numbers of negatives have been either lost or destroyed, and regional jealousies make matters worse. Even so, the neglect by intellectuals of their own heritage has been pretty culpable, though the British are partly to blame, since so many Indian academics and writers remain transfixed by the remains of a Europeanised education taught them before film studies were considered respectable. There are not many critics of real stature in India, and the most notable attempt to examine Indian film properly—Siddharth Kak's *Cinema Vision* quarterly—failed through lack of both advertising and readership. Had the National Film Development Corporation (roughly equivalent to Britain's BFI and NFFC rolled into one) provided enough funds to keep it afloat, it would have done an immensely valuable and comparatively inexpensive favour to everybody. As it is, the few copies of *Cinema Vision* that do exist are virtually collector's items.

Above: Shashi Kapoor in *New Delhi Times*.
Right: Shyam Benegal's *Trikal*,
about the Portuguese in Goa.

VIKAS PANDE
Executive Editor



INDIA'S MIDDLE CINEMA

DEREK MALCOLM



It isn't, of course, only in India that the ludicrously outdated art versus entertainment skirmishing precludes any decent debate. In Alan Parker's televised *Turnip-Head's Guide to the Cinema*, for instance, Derek Jarman (Art United) and David Puttnam (Entertainment Athletic) were put into opposition like warring football managers. Jarman suggested that Oscar-winning was not necessarily what the British cinema was about, to which Puttnam was edited in to reply: 'Happily, an Oscar is not something Derek Jarman will ever have to worry about.' This kind of sterile shin-hacking is continuous in India, between the old hands of the commercial field and the no longer quite so young bloods of the Parallel Cinema.

Putting it in the most general terms, the mutual insults are perfectly familiar, with the commercial side claiming that the Parallel film-makers are not making movies capable of selling tickets, and the Parallel supporters reviling the industry for playing down to the lowest common denominator. A few Indian writers on film won't accept this scenario, like T. G. Vaidyanathan, who teaches at Bangalore University. He is as likely to praise a commercial film as to curse an 'art' film for fakery. On the whole, though, most Indian critics and reviewers of any standing will not give much quarter to the commercial cinema.

Its greatest days may indeed have passed, like the greatest days of Hollywood, but no commercial system that could accommodate film-makers like Phalke, V. Shantaram, S. S. Vasan, Mehboob Khan, Guru Dutt and Bimal Roy could possibly be so debased as to be completely worthless now. In fact, despite the inroads of video piracy and the gradually increasing threat of television, it still holds enormous power over the 13 million who go to the cinema every day. It is not for nothing that two populous states, Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh, are ruled by M. G. Ramachandran and N. T. Rama Rao respectively, mighty regional stars whose appeal is such that it would take an earthquake to remove either from office.

The great video piracy debate is as yet unresolved and is costing the film industry many millions of rupees annually. Producers want piracy made a criminal offence, though as yet the government won't budge. Security is improving but is still appalling, and the shrewdest operators simply sell the video rights at the same time that they do a distribution deal. That way, the pirates have little time to do their worst and producers at least get something for the loss of cinema income. Television is as yet no such problem, since it buys old movies as avidly as the British networks and is anyway still largely a middle-class medium, government-controlled and frequently of consummate dullness. Piracy, however, has reached such proportions that, after the opening of a recent Indian festival, starry delegates went back to their five-star, and also government-controlled, hotel to discover one of the latest films turning up in their



Aparna Sen at the microphone.

rooms on closed circuit television.

The mighty, star-laden production system, though its hold on the cinema public may be loosening, leaves the Parallel film-makers with nowhere much to go for audiences. This has led the NFDC, which finances many of their films, to think seriously about either buying time in existing cinemas or establishing a network of its own. It has also led to the emergence of a Middle Cinema movement which in the last two or three years has attempted to defeat the commercial cinema on its own ground. It is intriguing, to say the least, to hear many of these aspiring populists condemning the commercial cinema out of hand, while making films that are not so very far away from the offerings which have, after all, kept India's 12,000 cinemas in profit for so long. But at least this proves that they now recognise little headway can be made without some attempt to give the public what it wants. For rather too long middle-class film-makers, often employing casts of the same ilk, have milked peasant life for themes of social and political relevance without the capacity to stir more than a few hearts and minds.

At this year's Filmotsav at Hyderabad, the Panorama section of new Indian films continued to show an entirely fresh complexion and a different kind of awareness. There were even the songs and dancing, still obligatory in commercial films and by no means the worst part of them, to be savoured on occasion. Though I, for one, could have done without one particular entrant, about a dancer who loses a leg and learns to dance on the remaining one—a true story apparently but encompassed with concussive sentimentality, resulting in tears of laughter from my section of the audience.

The most eagerly awaited of the new examples of Middle Cinema was probably Aparna Sen's *Paroma*, with a subject, a woman's adultery, which has been dealt with in dozens of Hindi

commercial films over the last decade, but seldom with the attempted depth of focus. *Paroma*, eloquently played by Raakhee Gulzar, a well-known star, is a beautiful married woman at the end of her youth who is seduced by a young photographer visiting Calcutta. She falls in love with him and reaps the whirlwind. When her dull businessman husband finds out he calls her a whore, mother-in-law takes to her bed with shock and the children are kept away from her. A happy, middle-class home is totally upended. It is not expected that she could or should require anything else from life.

The net result is a botched suicide attempt, a stay in hospital and a nervous breakdown. Finally, in resisting the attempt to persuade her to have psychiatric care, she discovers that guilt is useless, and that she has little to feel stricken about anyway. She resolves to go back home and get a job, even though she doesn't need the money. Her husband looks on aghast as she takes her first tentative step towards asserting her independence. Aparna Sen, whose debut as director was the highly successful *36 Chowringhee Lane*, has clearly tried to fashion a movie that rubs inconveniently against conventional Indian morality, and one that is a gentle but firm bow to feminism. But the middle ground that her film is intended to occupy may satisfy no one very much. It has already been accused by some of 'celebrating adultery', and by others of not going far enough. But it is the way it is made rather than what it tries to say that proves disappointing.

The film seems painfully overlong at 139 minutes for what is essentially a short story, and celebrates its sexual audaciousness with the kind of kissing and bed scenes that made one wonder at India's profligate birthrate. In addition, the one-dimensional characters of both lover and husband make it difficult to believe that *Paroma* would fall in the first place, or feel stricken about it in the second. But although the film is less likely to achieve international recognition than *36 Chowringhee Lane*, its nearness to your average Hindi romance—and the difference from such a film in its conclusions—may at least cause it to be thought of as a breakthrough in India itself. That is perhaps more important than the festival circuit abroad.

Govind Nihalani's new film may share the same fate. *Aghaat* is set in a Bombay engineering factory where two workers' unions are fighting for supremacy. The recognised union, long used to bargaining with the management, is continually second-guessed by a breakaway faction led by self-evident crooks whose demands are invariably greater and thus increasingly popular with the work force. When a worker is paralysed in a fall, the unofficial union seizes its chance, asking for three times the compensation demanded by the official union's harried leader. When the injured man dies, violence ensues, carefully orchestrated by the interlopers. The question is—should the official union meet the

disruption by force or not? The answer is that it should. And the unofficial union is finally sent packing. The film, based on the true events of internecine union struggle in Bombay, is heavily schematic, with Om Puri representing the Goodies and Gopi, bald and scowling, the Baddies. It is almost like a Western in contemporary clothing but with no very mythic undertones. Even the occasional subtleties of Half-Truth are missing, so that you distrust its simplicities even while you are enjoying its melodramatic attack.

Aghaat seems almost garish beside the beautifully made *New Delhi Times*, though this is not much more than a thriller with a conscience, such as Warner Brothers might have made some forty years ago. Shashi Kapoor plays the executive editor of a Delhi-based English-language daily who believes that a rising young politician is corrupt, seeks to investigate him and ends up being well and truly duped. Romesh Sharma's simple story points the depressing moral that politicians are generally too clever for campaigning journalists, who can be used at the very moment that they think they are striking out on behalf of the people. It is a good, fast-paced action thriller, excellently acted by Kapoor and others and shot with distinction by the great Subrata Mitra. And its lack of pretension, in these circumstances, is a positive advantage.

Perhaps the most interesting example of Middle Cinema is *Trikal*, which Shyam Benegal wrote as well as directed, and which for the first time discusses not English colonialism but the very different Portuguese variety in Goa. Not that *Trikal* is specifically political, structured as it is around the memories of a man in his forties who returns to the village mansion where he spent part of his youth during the last years of Portuguese occupation. The mansion is now derelict, but the memories recalled in flashback are of a family riven with the same feelings of confusion as most of the Goan middle-class at the time of the Indian government's takeover. Half want to flee to Portugal, the other half to accept the inevitable and stay.

Shot with a subtle assurance that alone makes it worth seeing, Benegal's film paints an extraordinary portrait of a little-known society totally different from the Anglo-Indian equivalent. But for the intrusion of ghosts summoned up by the old lady of the house and a few brief moments of political tub-thumping, *Trikal* could almost be some Eastern version of Chekov, and is certainly Benegal's most subtle attempt yet to illuminate the present by looking at the past. It was made in both Portuguese and Hindi, but one hopes the Portuguese version, with its much greater veracity, will be used outside India. Judging however by the response of Hyderabad audiences, who appeared to find *Trikal* too slow-moving for their taste, this attempt at Middle Cinema may come to grief at the box-office in the same way as Benegal's previous *Mandi*. If so, it will

perforce join the small group of films in this year's Indian Panorama which could never expect more than very specialised release.

The best of these by some way was Aravindan's *Chidambaram*. At Delhi in 1985, the outstanding film in the Panorama was Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Mukhamukham* (*Face to Face*). Both directors are from Kerala in the South, both are highly individual and distinctive film-makers and both have a hard row to hoe in attracting audiences away from starry commercial offerings. Which is perhaps why Aravindan cast Smita Patel in his story of the superintendent of an Indo-Swiss farm who seduces the peasant wife of one of his labourers, brings about the death of both and relapses into a purgatory of guilt. As the wife, Smita Patel was the one jarring note in the film for some South Indians, who know a genuine Keralan girl when they see one. But that won't matter to most people, since she is now such a good actress. Besides, the film itself is Aravindan's most mature and certain in style—a reflection upon a whole culture that not only looks superb but uses those looks to illustrate the several layers of meaning encapsulated in the tragedy. This is no melodrama but the gently disturbing tale of an action which destroys three individuals simply because it is beyond the norm of the particular society in which they live. And if that sounds like *Paroma* again, it goes far beyond that in its capacity to hold our attention as film-making.

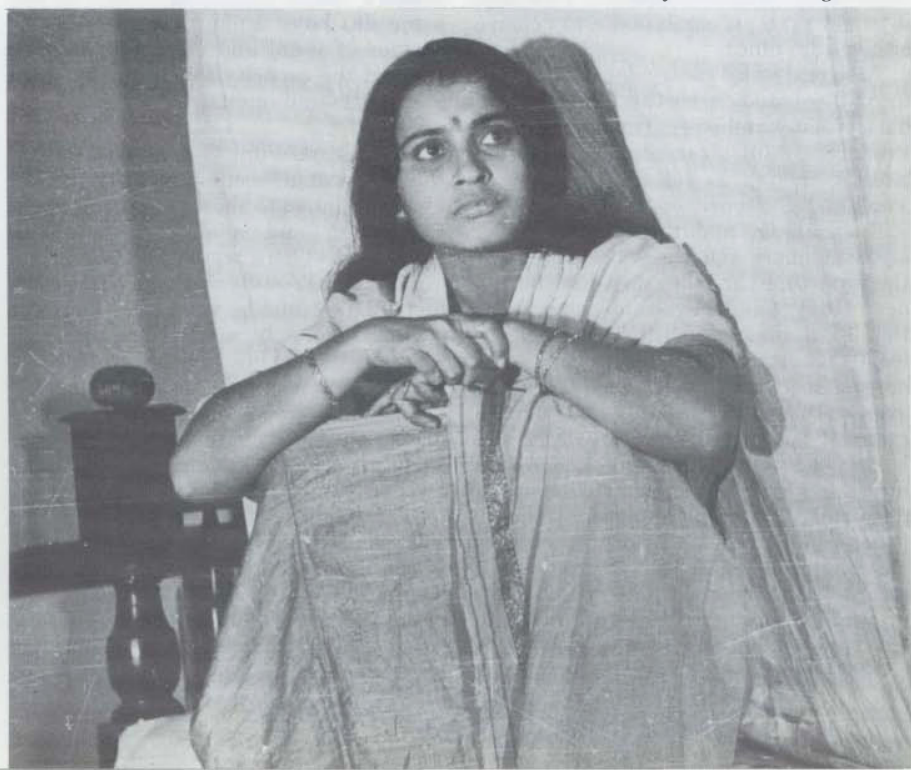
An equally impressive sidelong blast at India's still massively male-oriented sexual mores came from *Agnisnaan* (*Ordeal*), one of the half-dozen films which come out of Assam each year. Taken from his own novel by Bhabendra Saikia, it is about the revenge of a Sitalike wife whose dissolute mill-owning husband goes through a second marriage to a younger woman. Appalled as she

listens to their love-making from her own bedroom, she decides quietly and purposefully to outsmart her faithless husband. She gets herself pregnant by the friend who is also plundering the mill-owner's wealth, then faces her husband with the fact. He knows that he can say nothing, since to be rid of her would mean public as well as private shame.

There is a marvellously grave performance from Malaya Goswami, amazingly an amateur actress, in the central role, and Dr Saikia's film, set in the 1930s but remarkably up to date in spirit, is one of those that can justly be called both innocent and sophisticated at the same time. Innocent because there isn't a moment of pretentiousness in the whole film, and sophisticated because the heroine's quiet anguish and her burgeoning strength tell us more about the position of women in Indian society than many a more didactic tract. Trying to make a film in Assam, the director said afterwards, was like trying to catch a mouse with a dead cat. Despite that, he has succeeded remarkably well.

These two films were certainly good enough to cast some doubt on the validity of the Middle Cinema, which might so easily end up satisfying neither commercial nor artistic standards. But, on the whole, it must be a welcome sign that some of the better Indian film-makers are attempting to move towards the watching millions. It might be healthier still if those who encourage them knew and cared a little more about their own cinematic heritage, which is quite different from that of the West but equally tied to its own culture. This is possibly something that Raj Kapoor, who has just made another spectacularly successful epic some 35 years after *Awaara*, one of the most extraordinary as well as most popular of Indian films, understands better than those who sneer at him. There must be a lesson there somewhere. ■

Malaya Goswami in *Agnisnaan*.



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Cromer

May Day. To the opening of the refurbished Regal cinema in Cromer, an elongated building, tucked incongruously at one end of Hans Place, a neat, terraced side street. A new coat of paint and the cool, tasteful lettering of the cinema's name doesn't, somehow, make it look any more at home in these residential surroundings. I'm reminded of the set of *The Ladykillers* and expect to see Katie Johnson standing in a doorway holding the mallet with which she thumped the water pipes.

We are bidden for 7 p.m., for dinner, a special film preview and a midnight champagne breakfast. At 6.30 the entrance carpet is still being hoovered. Young men are busily washing the windows and the manager has not yet got out of his working clothes and into his suit. The evening, however, is glorious, and the London contingent, happy to be away from the dives of Soho and the dismal catered food of a hundred film previews, breathe in the blowy North Norfolk air.

Simon Perry and Alastair Gregory, who purchased the freehold of the bankrupt Regal from Ace Cinemas in April 1985 and went on to run the formerly ramshackle business with success for the remainder of the year (admissions up 60 per cent on the best recent year), had not, perhaps, reckoned on quite so many people in their café/bar foyer (design Fletcher Priest of the Manchester Cornerhouse and London's Electric Screen; clean lines and an oaten colour scheme). The crush was formidable. The food, colour-coordinated pasta, was slow to arrive, but instead of the anxiety one normally encounters on such occasions, the family—that is, most of us—politely held back.

It's hard to say exactly why an evening like this should be judged a hit. It was, after all, principally a public relations exercise (many will happily spend an evening far away from home for a 'champagne breakfast'), and the film business floats on lavish if not downright vulgar public relations exercises. Perhaps, in part, it was because there was a marked absence of hype. The actors—Bob Peck, Suzanna Hamilton, among others—were not putting on airs. A first-time feature director, Conny Templeman, brought her largish black dog, Tuesday. The manager, Alastair Gregory, brought his parents. The American lady from MGM/UA didn't for once find she was in Rio: there were no deals to be struck among the chattering Norfolk notability.

As his helmsmanship of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* through some testing waters proved, Simon Perry—assured, talkative, welcoming and (his trademark) permanently uncombed—has a producer's necessary hard-headedness, and probably, too, occasional hard-heartedness. He knows the art of professional glad-handing, of practised showmanship, which may be sincere but is, nevertheless, a job. But this particular evening took care of itself. He dispensed with a speech. The entertainment was to be traditional: an ad, a short subject and Charlie Gormley's *Heavenly Bodies*, a piece of Scottish whimsy, backed by Channel 4, about a sceptical teacher at a Roman Catholic school beset by miracles. The latter was a somewhat out of the way offering for the Regal—one local member of the audience slept through it, he good-humouredly informed Perry afterwards—which was previewing such staple coming attractions as *The Jewel of the Nile*, *Out of Africa* and *Down and Out in Beverly Hills*.

The advertisement was a period trifle from Pearl and Dean about jaw-breaking pastry. The short subject, however, was the real surprise, the 'special preview' merely a showmanly feint. No title: up on screen, seated in his own cinema, popped Simon Perry, who launched into the speech we thought we'd been spared. The singularity (in 1986) of this extended thank-you note to those who had helped him and his partner raise the £150,000 to overhaul the 326-seat cinema and to equip it with a 50-seat video meeting room (North Norfolk District Council gave £10,000) was that it was *not* a promotional video.

The film was, it must be said, slight. Simon and Alastair pad about Cromer questioning the locals about what they'd like to see at the Regal. Architects and bank managers are shaken hands with. A Cromer official, complete with chain, stands at the end of the famous Edwardian pier in front of the equally famous lifeboat and says his piece. To be sure, Perry and Gregory make fun of themselves. They are an unlikely pair (Gregory, an ex-Naval officer, is spruce and angular): would you really sell a second-hand cinema to them? And there is about the film a suggestion of 'And now we bid farewell to royal Cromer...' But the tone is not mocking and the 'thank you', even if a knowing 'thank you', is nevertheless sincere.

After the feature, the kitchen having pulled itself together and the champagne flowing merrily, I asked Perry how much his short subject cost. He wouldn't say, film-makers rarely do. It had been produced by Marc Samuelson, a partner in Umbrella Films, the production end of the Perry empire, and filmed, as a favour, by Marc's father, Sydney Samuelson. 'He came up here for two days,' Perry said, 'and brought with him the camera with which they shot *Star Wars*.' There's something about showmen...



The Rex revived.

Dereham

The opening of the Regal made an item on the regional BBC TV news. Did the evening rate, I asked the chief of the BBC crew. 'If I'm out on an evening, it rates,' he informed me. There is, apparently, now only one BBC newscrew based at Norwich. What was going on hereabouts, were there any local showmen?

Indeed, yes, and a cheerful figure, the very picture of an old-style cinema manager, was extracted from the crowd, Mr C. B. Aldis. Did he know the Regal? Yes, he and his wife Miriam, when they were young, came here regularly, had their particular seats in the balcony, D1 and 2. The auditorium had not changed a great deal. The moulding had been renewed, new seats installed, a small stage added beneath the screen. Mr Aldis examined the seats: nice enough, but the seats in the second and smaller of his two cinemas in Dereham, now they were what he would call real seats ('Classics' bought for £1,300 from Rank). One key rule of showmanship is, remain on the offensive. Surely I must have heard of the small cinema. It had, Miriam said, been written up in *Tit-bits* and *Screen International*. The BBC news had done a story. I was sorry, I had not. (I once heard Ismail Merchant employ a similar strategy. A gossip columnist congratulated him at a party on *A Room with a View*. 'How can you say you liked the film,' Ismail remonstrated at the top of his voice, 'when you came in five minutes late!') Observing the man's bewilderment, the producer burst out laughing. 'I must stop doing that,' he confided later.)

Mr Aldis, whose cinemas are named the CBA group ('ABC backwards'), is most proud of the cinema in his garage. It is, he says, the smallest licensed cinema in

Britain; 35 and 16mm; a 6 by 10ft screen, 14ft across for CinemaScope; a full programme with trimmings; all 30 seats are bookable, such is the demand. Mr Aldis knows exhibition from the bottom up. The walls of the cinema are hung with cherry-red drapes. The evening's entertainment begins with a scale model of an organ (he wishes it could be larger) rising up and playing a selection of organ music. Four flavours of Aldous ice-cream, a Norwich speciality, 25p a cornet, are served to the patrons. Admission is £1.50; weekly take about £325.

Next week, Mr Aldis said, he had booked *King Solomon's Mines*, the Cannon version; he had the greatest hopes for it. He would tell me something for nothing: *Year of the Dragon* had been booked at his regular cinema and it had emptied the house. He loved the cinema, lived for it. His whole family was involved in the CBA enterprise. Miriam had on occasion laced up the films; their 13-year-old daughter tore the tickets at the smaller theatre. Full of anticipation, Mr and Mrs Aldis made their way to seats D1 and 2—but when they got there, it was, unfortunately, standing room only.

Aberdare

While shooting *The Works*, an s4c feature film about the effects of computerisation on a widget factory, in the teeth of the 1984 winter at Aberdare, South Wales, the director Stephen Bayly happened upon a disused cinema. He was searching for an executive lavatory, done up to old-world standards, to use as part of the set for an office suite at his fictional factory. The cinema, the Rex, could not provide him with what he needed, but a tour of its dilapidated, sodden interior did spark two ideas. One was for a feature, *Coming Up Roses*, scripted by Bayly's regular collaborator Ruth Carter, about a cinema projectionist and an ice-cream lady and a clapped-out cinema that needs rescuing, which was premiered in the 'Certain Regard' section of Cannes—the first Welsh-language film ever seen there. It was received, one reads, with enthusiasm.

'The Rex was a handsome 30s cinema,' Bayly told me on the eve of his departure for the South of France. 'It was built by the wealthy father of Rex Willis, the Welsh rugby player, and given to the son as a present. It was in its time one of five cinemas in Aberdare. These dwindled to two, one of which became a bingo hall. In 1981, the owners of the bingo palace bought the by now rundown Rex and put up the shutters. Just how much the town, in which there is really nothing to do for entertainment except get drunk, needed a cinema was brought home to me by one particular incident. Some kids had broken in and vandalised the cinema. But in one room, where there was a pile of old cinema magazines, they had clearly been back, judging from the cigarette butts,

not to wreck the place but to sit down for a read.'

Bayly, an American long resident in London, who is a partner with the producer Linda James in Red Rooster Films, has carved a niche for himself as the pre-eminent supplier of Welsh-language features for s4c. *The Works*, he tells me, which was shown on s4c last Christmas (and should be appearing on Channel 4 later this year), drew the highest-ever ratings for a Welsh television drama. He has taught himself Welsh and his commitment to the country is strong though not exclusive (he is well-attuned to the politics, can tell a South Walian accent from a North).

The notion of setting up as an exhibitor had not struck him before *Coming Up Roses* got under way. Market research was conducted (he is an old advertising films man and knows the ropes) and the feasibility of reopening the cinema confirmed. Prime Site Entertainments was formed and, at the time of writing, a £1.4m deal is on the point of being finalised. 'When word got about that we hoped to revive the Rex,' Bayly said, 'Mid-Glamorgan Council actually rang us up to say they would support the scheme.'

Hopes had been to open *Coming Up Roses* (unbeatable showmanship) in the autumn as the first attraction of the refurbished Rex—two screens, 700 and 272 seats; restaurant/bar; conference room (miners' meetings, etc). The cinema it now seems, however, will not reopen until Christmas (the cornerstone of the all-Welsh financing is an urban development grant for 40 per cent of the capital expenditure from Cynon Valley Borough Council). Bayly—like Simon Perry at the Regal—aims to involve himself at arm's length with the programming policy.

'While we were shooting *Coming Up Roses*, which was modestly budgeted at £235,000,' Bayly said, 'Dave Berry, the historian of film in Wales, pointed out the similarity of our plot to that of *The Smallest Show on Earth*. Having never

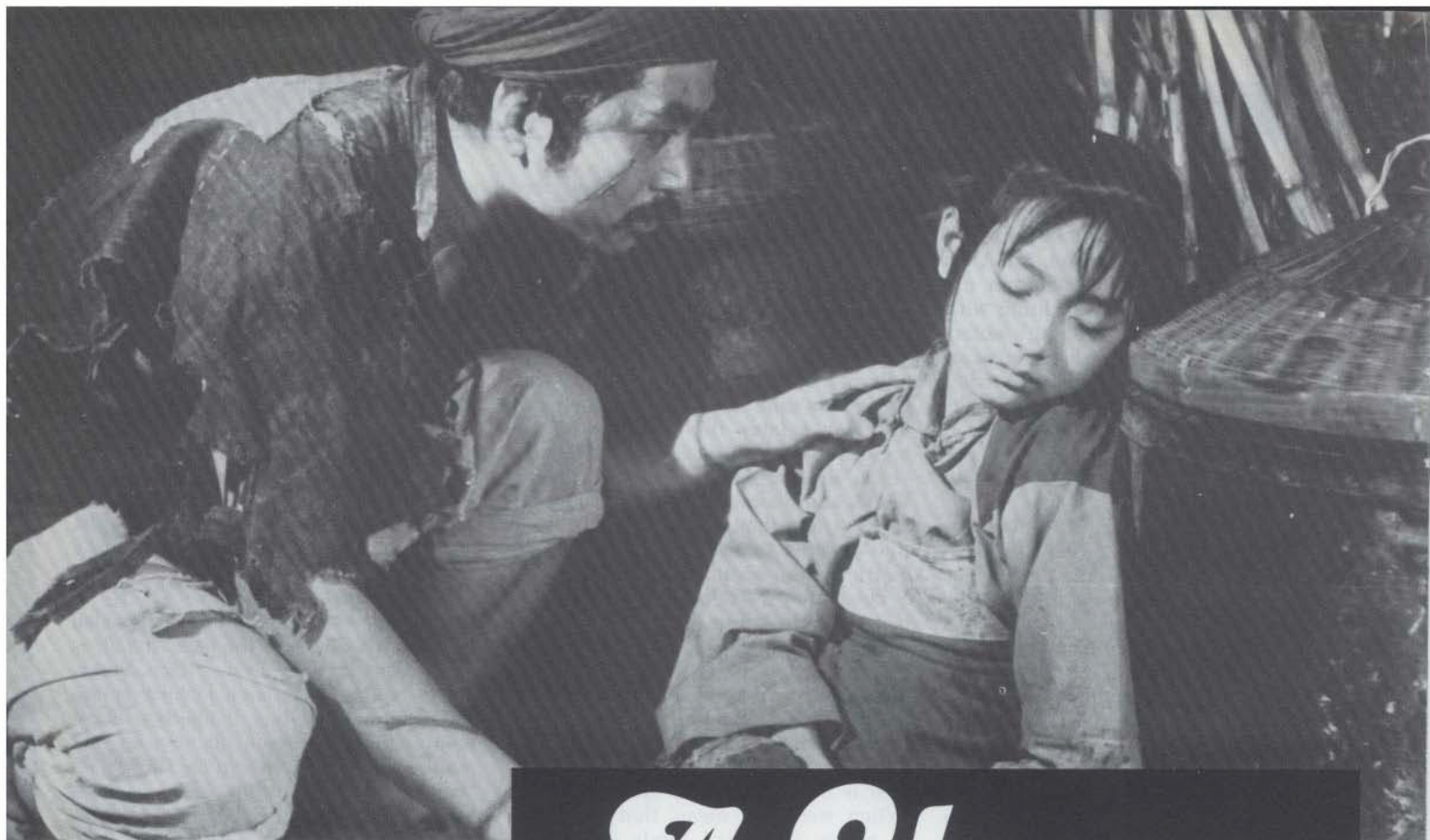
seen the film, I arranged a screening of it, open to the town, one evening at the Rex. When we were filming *The Works* at a disused factory, a lot of people approached us and asked whether we were reopening the factory. The same thing occurred that evening at the cinema. I felt that *The Smallest Show on Earth* could not, in all conscience, be the last film at the Rex.' William Haggart (1851-1924), the former fairground showman and Welsh film pioneer, had a studio in Aberdare; and one feels that the maker of *The Maniac's Guillotine* (1902) and *The Dumb Man of Manchester* (1908) must be looking down favourably on Bayly's enterprise.

A film which Bayly hopes shortly to produce (and which might have appealed to Haggart's taste for the sensational) is *Vigo, Père et Fils*. Like Simon Perry, Bayly has recently been looking across the Channel: he has made two documentaries, *The Dream Factory*, on film studios, and *The Flea and the Giants*, on the computer revolution, with the Paris based Les Films du Sabre. Red Rooster and Quentin Raspail's Films du Sabre have now joined forces in the company London-Paris Express, in the first portfolio of which is an English drama, set in the early 19th century, about a mad Frenchman, the self-proclaimed 'King of Patagonia', and *Al Wathig* (English and Arabic), about a young *médecin sans frontières* and a latter-day Robin Hood, set against 'a background of famine and revolution in modern Sudan'. A film about *Vigo*, however, has been one of Bayly's longest-cherished projects. A script has been written by Robin Chapman which Bayly describes as 'the film Jean Vigo might have made about the father with whom he was obsessed.' Diligent readers of this column will remember that *Vigo's* anarchist father, who was garroted in prison with his own shoelaces, went under the name of Almereida.

PETER QUINCE

Coming Up Roses: Iola Gregory and Dafydd Hywel.





China, I knew, had given the world gunpowder, the noodle and the water-clock. Micro-observations of snow crystals predate western experiments by a thousand years. So, during my year in China, I kept expecting to read that excavators had found, in a Han Dynasty tomb, a small box, made of onyx, with a ground glass screen, ivory control buttons and an ox-hide cable with a three-pronged device at the end of it—the prototype of the tv.

In reality, China 'discovered' the Timid Giant, as Marshall McLuhan once dubbed television, in 1958. The mosaic of the tv image, said McLuhan, is more suited to cultures with a non-phonetic alphabet—and the people of the pictogram took to the new medium like ducks to water, as the statistics for television ownership amply bear out. They also trace a steeply rising graph of New China's burgeoning prosperity.

In 1958, there were only 10,000 sets in the whole country. Today, in urban districts, 83 per cent of all households have a tv, ranking the Timid Giant fourth, after the wristwatch, bicycle and radio, among the most coveted consumer goods in the People's Republic. The red glow of the 'on' button is a beacon proclaiming modernity. Viewing figures, of 100 million for the most popular programmes, shrink our media productions to the level of minority culture, ethnic curiosities.

In 1958, there was only one channel, broadcasting in black and white. Its brief was simple—the elimination of falsehood: the upholding of truth; or, in Mao Tse-tung's famous phrase, 'combating the wicked wind'. Mao, unlike Marx, realised that changed economic

A Year in front of the Dianshi

SIMON WORRALL

relations alone would not lead to the creation of the New Socialist Man. Correct perception held the key to the future. The Timid Giant was immediately integrated, along with a plethora of other media—some of them, like the 'Tatzupao' (handwritten poster) or street blackboard, distinctively Chinese—into one of the most extensive communications systems in the world. The ideological Long March, the largest scale attempt to change the cognitive maps of a whole people ever undertaken, had begun.

The 'wicked wind', of course, was howling in from the West: squalls of bourgeois

individualism; gales of decadence; gusts of democratic pluralism. Television, then, as ideological sou'wester. 'Remove this poisonous arrow shot at the working class,' thundered the Great Helmsman, in a letter from the bridge, attacking the force ten reactionary film *Sun Wukong Thrice Defeats the White Bone Demon*.

In today's changeable political climate, however, where the contending fronts buffet against each other like air currents over the Alps, political meteorology is not so easy. Is a peasant who spurns the Party but zealously cultivates his plot of land to buy his son a motorcycle a bourgeois renegade or a

hero of the Four Modernisations? Is a youth who lets dust gather on his *Das Kapital*, devoting all his time to poring over American computer manuals, a reactionary scab or a standard-bearer of the new China? Ideological föhn.

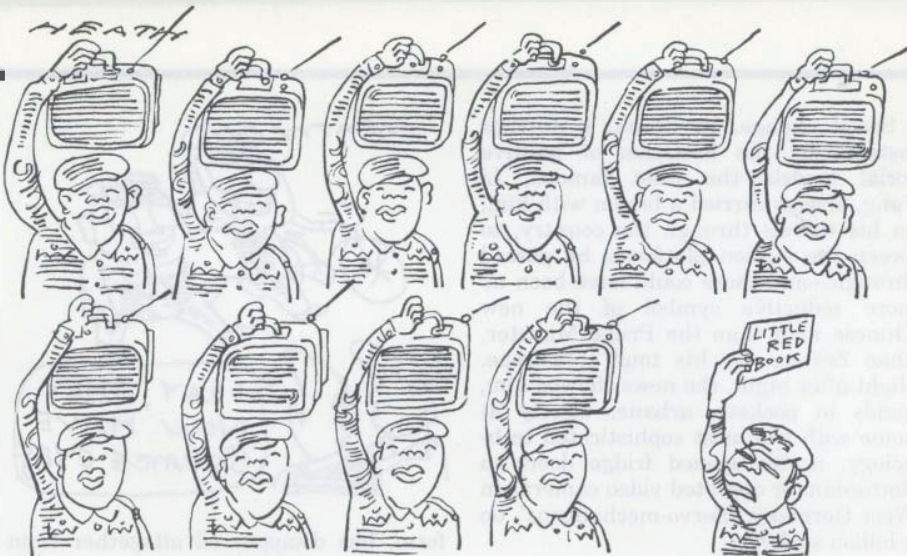
In 1958, the evening news consisted of shots of production brigades with a voice-over commentary. Today, it is presented by two newscasters, one male and one female, dressed in elegant western clothes. Before they appear, there is a film montage, as slick as anything in the West, which is a potent, condensed visual celebration of today's China. Accompanied by the National Anthem, giant combine-harvesters sweep over fields of wheat; water thunders through hydro-electric turbines; cranes swing mammoth machine parts through the air; soldiers of the PLA march with clock-like precision.

World news gets ten minutes of the half-hour, before the weather. It is a strange picture you get of the world. The criteria for selection seem obscure. A disproportionate amount of news came from little Sri Lanka. Clips of President Reagan, or the German parliament, are sandwiched between curious human interest stories—one day, a portrait of a girl ballerina in London; the next, a baboon in Kuala Lumpur trained by a zoo keeper to mind a pool of alligators. There are goals from Tottenham or FC Bayern, and catastrophes—Australian bush fires; a blazing rubber-tyre factory in Arkansas. Every day, it seems, something, somewhere is burning in the West.

Home news projects a uniformly favourable, optimistic picture, an endorsement of Deng Xiao Ping's attempt to move the economic mountain. Everything is getting better and better—fish ponds teem with carp; writers declaim a new-found self-confidence. Even the battery hens are doing their bit for the Four Modernisations. Tunnels are blasted; railway lines laid; night after night, until it feels as though you are watching a tape-loop, officials cut red ribbons to open new dams, factories or schools. And everyone is cheerful. A group of peasants in Szechuan are shown, smiling and happy, as they board a new bus laid on for them by the municipality to enable them to get their produce, fresh, to the Free Market—even though, outside, it is pitch dark, 4 a.m. and freezing cold.

Neil Postman's contention that tv trivialises by only selecting those events for coverage that possess media suitability is not yet true of China. Two minutes of prime time were given over to a rural fire brigade. First they washed their fire engines; then they sponged them down. A fireman showed how his hose could discharge water in two ways—in a jet or a fine spray.

There is endless footage of conferences, seminars or 'xiao zu', small self-criticism groups. China, confirms



the news, is a society of The Meeting—and it makes terrible television. Freezing halls; vacant faces; cigarette smoke. Sore bums, stiff backs, talk, talk, talk. Always, the camera dwells on the one person taking notes, as if to say *someone* is listening.

The news also nightly vindicates the new foreign policies of the government. Through the 'open door' of the Zhong Nan Hai, formerly the Emperor's living-quarters, now used for receiving visiting dignitaries, the world is literally pouring. Margaret Thatcher, Helmut Kohl; fat Americans with dollar-signs in their eyes or svelt technocrats from Japan; capitalist or communist, tense Sandinistas or glowering autocrats from Turkey with prisons full of maimed political prisoners at home—China is welcoming them all, and always in the same way. First, an *éminence grise* from the Central Party, whose arm constantly seems on the point of being dislocated from the shoulder with all the pumping, shakes hands with the curious strangers who, like the queues at Madame Tussaud's, are pleased to have got in, at last, to the Forbidden City. Then comes tea and talk across acres of fabulous carpets, as a prelude to the signing of contracts and accords. A group photo fixes the images for posterity.

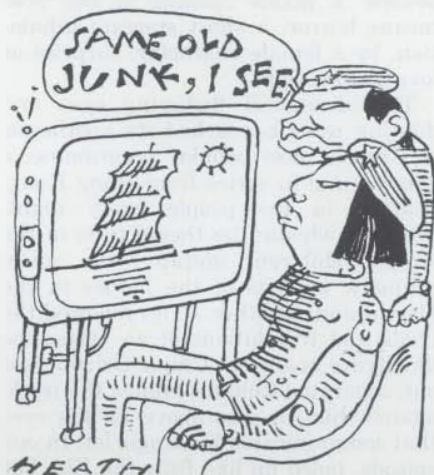
To the Chinese, watching the lines of foreigners bowing and scraping to their leaders, it must seem as though the fawning inscription engraved on a clock presented by Queen Victoria

to one of the last Emperors, as an inducement to trade, has a sudden, new contemporaneity—'Ba fang xiang hua, jiu tu lai wang,' 'From all corners of the earth, we come to call thee King.'

Here is an ancient Chinese fable in which a sage comes to a remote village. Seeing a frail old man struggling to raise water from a well by hand, he explains a simple device, a counter-weighted pole, that would save him much time and effort. 'Whoever uses machines does all his work like a machine,' replies the old man, declining the sage's help. 'He who does his work like a machine grows a heart like a machine. And he who carries the heart of a machine in his breast loses his simplicity. It is not that I do not know of such things; I am ashamed to use them.'

Modernisation, say the sociologists, is above all a communication process. Every evening, television in China batters away at the last remaining vestiges of feudal thinking like the old man's. Relentlessly, it spreads the ethic of modernity, lubricating those huge shifts that characterise social change in all Third World countries—from localism to cosmopolitanism; from the country to the city; from the abacus and the handcart to the computer and the vw bus.

McLuhan suggested in *The Gadget Lover*, his thesis predated a thousand years by the fable of the old man and the sage, that by embracing new technologies we run the risk of becoming their slaves, serving them like 'gods or minor religions'. In China the cult of Mao has been replaced by the cult of the combustion engine and the X-ray. The people of the dragon are literally under the spell of the machine. The dominant image of the news is groups of Chinese crowding round a newly installed gadget as a white-coated technician explains its function. These images are proscriptive, rather than descriptive. They intend, by instituting a process of empathy and identification by which China's 800 million agriculturalists will be led, like the horse to water, into the machine age, to influence events, not merely report them.



Social change, in China, is further fostered by the imitation of positive social models—the most famous, Li Fang, always carried a broom with him, on his travels through the country, to sweep the station platforms he passed through—and there could have been no more seductive symbol of the new Chinese man than the Prime Minister, Zhao Zeyang, on his tour of Europe. Night after night, the news showed him, hands in pockets, urbane, utterly at home with the most sophisticated technology, as he opened fridge doors in Rotterdam or operated video cameras in West Germany. ‘Servo-mechanisms’, on a billion scale?

The most famous panda in China is called Wei Wei. At the Shanghai circus his most beloved trick is to eat a western breakfast with a huge knife and fork. Wei Wei was also to be seen on a popular commercial pushing a 28" colour television towards the camera, and then sitting down contentedly in front of it—television as self-conscious medium.

Watching commercials for a year in China prompted the question: Who are they for? No one has a fridge stuffed full of plastic-wrapped vegetables and fruit like the one showed in one ad. Who, apart from Wei Wei, can afford to spend a year's salary on a massive colour tv?

Advertising in China, however, is much less about selling products than it is about selling, like the news, a vision of the future. Correct perception, in a weird new guise, again holds the key to the future—it isn't what you need, but what we can make you think you need. A Hong Kong commercial advertised electric typewriters, Xerox machines and dump trucks with the misleading slogan: ‘A full range of daily necessities for the home, office or travels.’ Daily necessities? Dump trucks? Xerox machines?

Chinese advertising practises other familiar deceptions. The girls at the banks of typewriters are all smiling and happy. The machine is macho—*men* do wheelies on Hondas; *men* fly aeroplanes; *men* operate computers. Women, always smiling, operate washing machines. One commercial made it quite clear that the possession of esoteric technical knowledge, the root of power in all societies, is a male domain. As her boyfriend leafed through a catalogue for Sharp electronics, a girl asked what each gadget was and how it functioned. The gadget spun out of the page, performed its tricks. Adoringly as the First Lady, the girl listened to her boyfriend's authoritative explanations, proving another of McLuhan's theses—that tv is ideally suited to the how-to-do-it of process. Other programmes, aimed at improving the technical literacy of the Chinese, showed how to clean a camera, operate a computer or store cassette tapes.

Not that ideology, in its pure didactic



form, has disappeared altogether from the screen—it just looks different: much more like ours. Wei Wei pushing the tv is ideology, the equivalent of readings from *The Little Red Book*—only more effective. Mao must be turning in his glass sarcophagus.

The ideologues proper, earnest bespectacled men still wearing Mao suits and not yet so corrupted by the numerous cosmetics commercials as to run out to the nearest Hundred Goods Store and buy a bar of Dragon Brand soap to have a go at their acne, have been banished to Sunday afternoon along with the tv University's maths teachers and the soma of the foreign community, *Robin Hood* (in English). There, with ratings, I suspect, as low as for programmes like *Brideshead Revisited* or *The Jewel in the Crown*—a mere thirty million or so—they lecture the masses on ‘The Four Stresses and Five Points of Beauty’, or give interminable class analyses of the classics of Chinese literature.

If Beijing Opera is the drama of the sleeve (different arrangements of the flowing ‘water sleeve’ have different meanings), as someone once frivolously remarked, then Chinese tv drama is the drama of the eye and the sigh. Night after night, in numerous historical soap operas, the Chinese equivalent of the Western, the nation's tv thespians practise their art. Worlds of suggestiveness and emotion are communicated by the slightest ocular movements, the drawing or exhalation of breath—a manic opening of the eyes means horror; a short staccato inhalation, by a female character, surprise or love at first sight.

This drama of flickering eyes and dilating nostrils reached its apotheosis in China's most popular programme, a windy kung-fu series from Hong Kong, beamed to the people every night. Workers whistle the theme tune in the street; children imitate the melodramatic exploits of the heroes in the playground. Another series followed the trials and tribulations of an Odysseus-like figure in ancient China. Driven, cast out, separated from his family, the world against him, it was above all his eyes that communicated his tragic lot. In one episode, holed up like Billy the Kid, but

in a deserted Buddhist temple, he was attacked by three cloaked thugs. Tables were sliced in half; sutras run through; statuary hurled. Spilling out on to the snow-covered fields, the fight assumed Homeric proportions as, doing back-flips and somersaults, leaping and kicking, our hero saw off his three assailants, outfacing fate—at least for another week.

Foreign programmes have huge ratings. There is ‘Sherlock Holm-ez’ and ‘Doctor What-a-sun’, in Chinese; numerous films about the Second World War; and a long-running family saga from Japan about the agonies of suburban life in Tokyo—a poisonous arrow shot at the working class, if ever there was one.

One of the accepted premises of Chinese Marxist film theory is that images and ideology should be firmly rooted in ‘the real life of the nation’. And during a day in a small fishing village in northern China I had the chance to observe this ‘real life’. A mule stood in the dilapidated sun-drenched square: children played skip-rope; a woman in a tin shed sold lemonade. It all had that mixture of paradox, rural stagnation and timelessness that, in the hands of the Taviani brothers, would make classic footage—a farmer peeped over a hedge at a female comrade who, unawares, had squatted down for a pee; in the station waiting-room, under faded timetables, wizened old women sat with baskets of eggs over their arms, next to them teenagers who played cards and listened to rock and roll; a duckling squeaked repeatedly under a girl's coat; people spat on the floor.

Above all, it had humour. But humour resides in the gap between reality and illusion: its stock in trade is contradiction and the deflating of phony values—and that is not what the authorities want on the tv in China. Like the news, most programmes are in the business of creating, not depicting, reality. Controversial, difficult problems like ‘The Back Door’, code for that crippling system of nepotism and favouritism so prevalent in China, are skated over or ignored. Problems of youth sexuality, aggravated by circumstance and Victorian public values (most Chinese don't marry until their mid or late twenties, due to the housing shortage: pre-marital sex is frowned upon), are prevalent on the street but absent from the screen.

Sometimes reality, warts and all, does swim through the finely drawn mesh of the censor, and there are moving, exceptional films that celebrate human dignity and the richness of the familiar in an unforced, lyrical style long since eaten out of most of our media productions by the acid of the box office and the rating. Too often, though, the ‘real life of the nation’ is retouched, prettified and replaced by a safe, deceptive ‘Cockaigne’, a cinematic Fata Morgana that melts into the air as soon as you switch off the box and step out into the



Drama of the eye: Qi Ka (centre) in *Generals of the Yang Family*.

vivid, paradoxical, humorous world that China, really, is.

Jllusion and the subversion of reality are the speciality of the great entertainers of Chinese television, the jugglers, clowns and acrobats. Nightly, the impossible is performed. Men squeeze themselves through ceramic pipes as wide as a football: twenty white-clad women ride one bicycle. My favourite was a musical duo. One man stood strumming a guitar; a second leaped up on his shoulders with a violin, upended himself, then did a head-stand on the first man's head. Together, they played 'Jingle Bells' and 'Tannenbaum', the man on top bowing his violin, upside down, like Paganini in gravity-free space.

As riveting were the verbal jugglers of the 'Cross-Talk' shows. 'Cross-Talk', a traditional Chinese form of comedy that brilliantly exploits the potential for misunderstanding, double entendre and lateral thinking in a language where one syllable spoken with one 'tone' can already have multiple meanings but, spoken in one of the three other tones, a bewildering range of significance.

There are always two speakers—traditionally male, though there are now many successful women acts. Usually they conform to the pattern of the great

comic duos of the West, Laurel and Hardy, or Morecambe and Wise—one is bigger, more literal, a bit slow: the other, elfin, garrulous and quick-witted. At its best it is as thrilling as trapeze, the patter flying through the air at lightning speed and, seemingly, with the greatest of ease. For the semantic rope-walkers of 'Cross-Talk', though, there is no safety net—except the genial indulgence of the huge audiences.

The best thing about watching tv in China for a year was what it *didn't* show. For a year there was no *Dallas* or Princess Di. For a year I knew that if I switched on I could be sure that I would not be bombarded with triviality, commercialism, sexism and greed. The gods of sport, kulchur or politics were banished, and with them the fawning alienation of the cult of personality.

A year in front of the box in China also changed my perspective on my own society. Everything looked worse, and better. Worse because, from China, the sight of British policemen, mounted on horses, charging down miners in foggy Yorkshire lanes made my own country look like an anachronistic cliché from a DDR school-reader on class oppression. From China, the antics of Parliamentarians confirmed Coleridge's remark

that the House is like Noah's Ark, 'a few men, and a lot of beasts'.

Better because, working like a telescope turned round the wrong way, Chinese television put a great distance between me and my own political culture. Set in relief against the world's largest, and differently minded, population, the demagogues of the global conservative conspiracy, looming so large at home because of their ubiquity and inflated rhetoric, were relativised to their rightful proportions—a shrill, objectionable minority.

For a year the intellectual contortionism and empirical juggling tricks of the apologists of nuclear madness were phased out by the good sense of China's neutrality and the real skill and dexterity of the tv acrobats. Daily, the clowns of the New Right were upstaged by the 'Chou', the fools of Beijing Opera, who to make them easily distinguishable from honest, decent folk and prevent the possibility of their utterances being mistaken for the truth, always wear a mask of white make-up painted over their nose and eyes—a practice that might be introduced, to good effect, for the Norman Tebbits, Jeffrey Archers and Jeane Kirkpatrick of the world. ■

There will be a season of Chinese television at the NFT later in the year.

Urgent Take-off, a programme about the Chinese air force.



The Quay Brothers' film *Street of Crocodiles* begins with a glob of spit. It falls from the mouth of an aged museum curator into the ambiguous mechanical parts of what used to be called a philosophical toy—one of those numerous, patented, primitive viewing-machines, precursors of the early cinema. This gift of human saliva, performing the same function as the finger of Michelangelo's God on Adam, animates a universe—a largely monochromatic universe—full of that intermittent stop and start, frenzy and frozen moment that takes you from Marey and Muybridge to Méliès, the three Ms of the cinema's poetic beginnings.

A neatly self-reflexive metaphor for the Quays to choose. And their Adam is a puppet somewhere between a single portrait of their double-selves and a portrait of—in this case—their own animator, Bruno Schulz, who, according to his English translator, was unattractive and sickly with a thin, angular body and deep-set eyes in a pale triangular face. This puppet has the sort of hair that reminds you of the sensation of bare knees on coconut matting and the sort of shabby black clothes associated with classroom chalk and ink. All very tactile and associative. Rust and dust, grime and slime, oil and blood. It irritates the nasal passages, dries out the natural oil of your palms, makes you want to cut your fingernails, sneeze and spit.

After considerable wandering amongst some of the more *recherché* heroes and idols of early twentieth century Belgium and Czechoslovakia, the Brothers Quay have alighted in ideal territory—Drohobycz according to Schulz—a city of dark streets, ambiguous rites, abandoned stages, long nocturnal perspectives, creaking machines of dubious purpose, panic, boredom and melancholia.

Schulz wrote about his Polish birth-



place in the 1930s in a way that Italo Calvino wrote about Venice in *Invisible Cities*—infinite fictional variations on a favourite city. Both authors could hardly be said to have written short stories with a narrative, more like descriptions with some narrative content. And so it is with the Quay Brothers' film. To ask for anything in the way of a neatly pack-

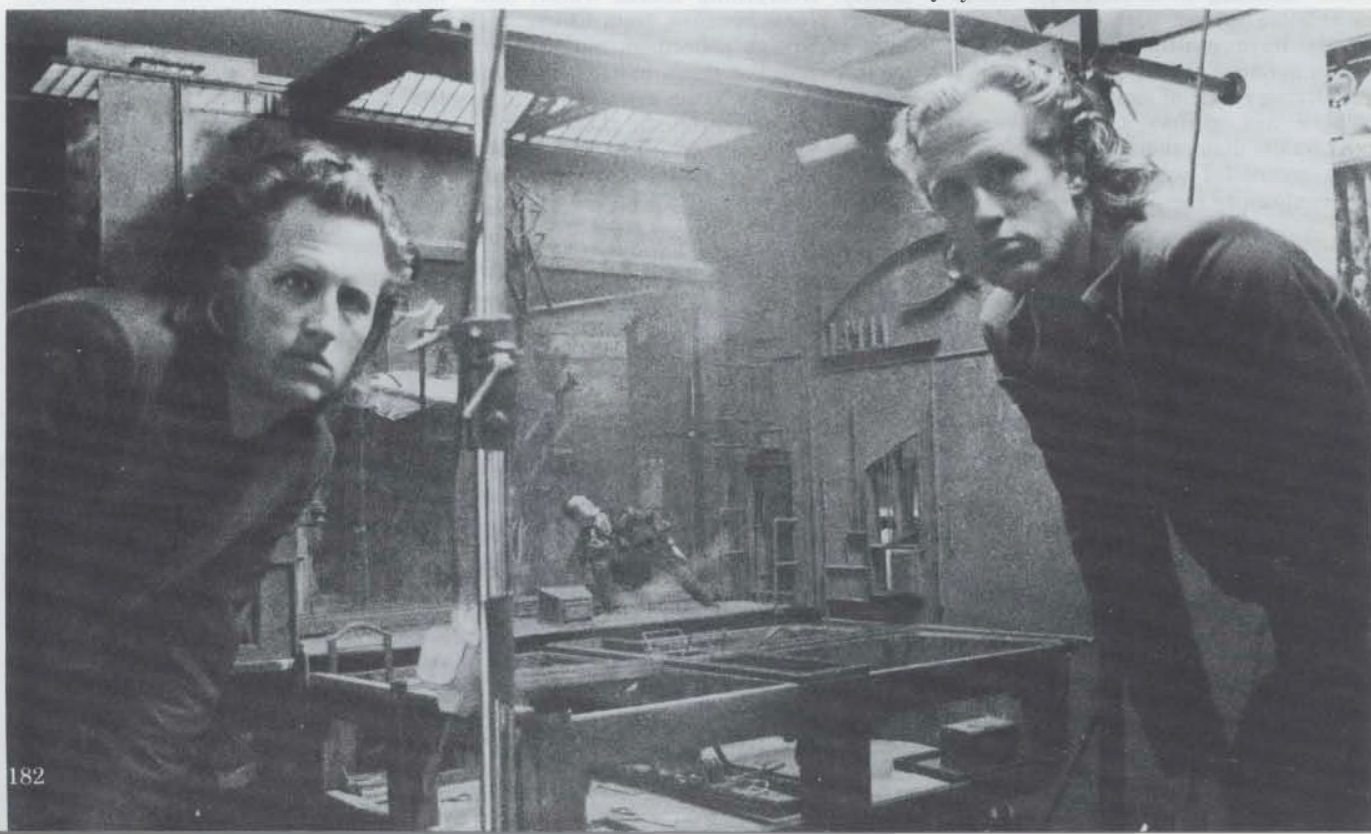
aged story is to ask for the wrong thing.

Bruno Schulz wrote some twenty-six stories in some ten years, before being shot dead in the street by a Gestapo officer in 1942, an event that apparently terminated a feud fuelled by the ownership of some of Schulz's drawings. For Schulz was a draughtsman. He taught drawing in a boys' secondary school; his

Street of Crocodiles

Peter Greenaway

The Quay Brothers and a *Street of Crocodiles* model.





drawings reminding you sometimes of Beckmann, even of Sendak. His figures have large heads with the eyes straining up to look at you from under even larger foreheads.

The Street of Crocodiles is marked on the map of Drohobycz as a white space, reluctantly acknowledged, scratched in with a few lines, a place of some equivocation, of dubious purposes, of store-rooms of books and photographs of unanticipated licentiousness, of tailors that will dress you at the front of the shop and undress you at the back, of shabby facades where the inhabitants are quite proud of an odour of corruption. It doesn't sound a million miles from Soho, where you can often see the Quay Brothers, nonchalantly dressed to look alike to confuse certain recognition, riding swift, black, skeletal bicycles. Maybe the Street of Crocodiles is the Quay synonym for Soho. Although there is no talk of film in Schulz's Drohobycz, there is much talk of puppets and dolls, paper-thin cutouts, animated pictures, oakum and *papier-mâché* and an ex-

tended treatise on the Life and Thoughts of Tailors' Dummies.

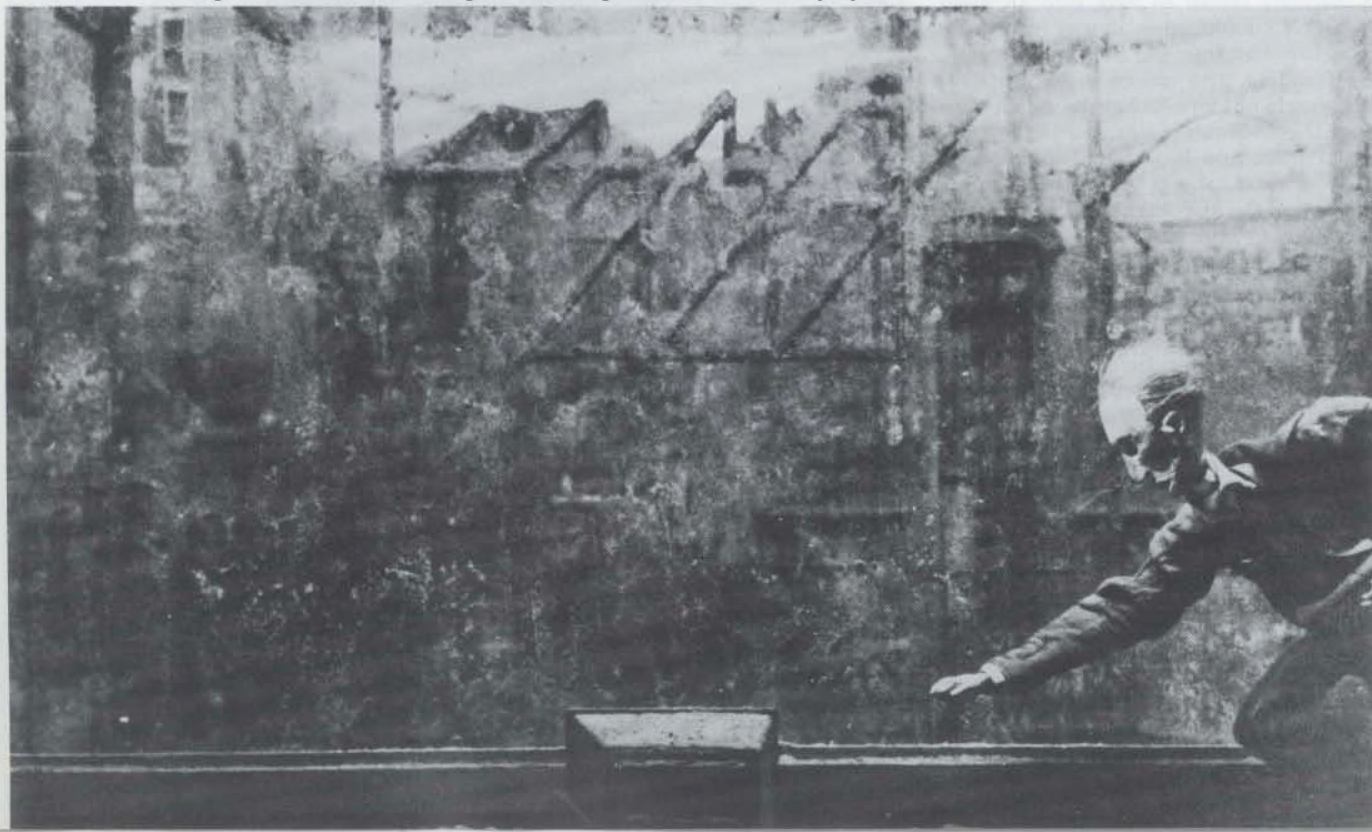
The Quays' animated hero gains his freedom at the snip of a pair of crocodile-jawed scissors somewhere near Rathbone Street and Charlotte Street and, going south, tremulously explores the night-time back streets. He finds empty theatres in Wardour Street, witnesses the Dance of the Screws in St Anne's Court and an urchin trapping light in Dean Street. Carrying a black and white diagonally striped box that he must have stolen from *Un Chien Andalou*, he finds a tailor's shop near Shaftesbury Avenue and is a one-man audience to a dance of tailor's dolls. Scalped and eerily lit from above so that their eye-sockets gleam blindly, they entertain and then they remove his head, wrapping it neatly in tailor's tissue. There are moments of nicely ambiguous eroticism involving kidneys and steel pins, wet liver wrapped in tissue-paper, stray hands stroking black serge and moments of shock when brilliant colour floods unexpectedly into a black and white world.

The Quays know Schulz well. It is often possible to see how they have picked out a phrase, an evocative sentence here and an evocative sentence there and have elaborated upon them. It is an analogous method to Schulz himself, who takes a single fact or proposition and extends and elaborates it, building a complex system of metaphors without strain which takes you far from the original starting point. For the Quays, one phrase from Schulz, '... a light grey vegetation of fluffy weeds', is a cue for a fall of dandelion seeds; or maybe it's thistledown which drifts on to the set which beforehand is exclusively man-made. The vegetation decays before our eyes, moulds, festers and becomes covered in wet dust and made part of the ambiguous grime of the city.

In the seven years since the BFI-funded *Nocturna Artificialia*, the Quay Brothers' skill and imagination at handling and binding together the various animation processes suggests maybe that they ought to embark on a larger canvas and a more completely original work. It would be good to see them scale up their world and bring their dramatic lighting, their use of colour, their creation of atmosphere, their unsettling eye and rich delight in the texture of 'stuff' and 'matter'—another Schulz preoccupation—to full human scale.

Their talents could be yoked to the use of actors and free them from the drudgery of the time-lapse animation camera. The prospect of the patience and labour required by such animation processes is daunting at anything longer than ten minutes. They, of course, might find this presumptuous or unnecessary when so many contemporary visual products demand and insist that humans should behave like automatons and robots and puppets. Read the book and see the film. ■

'... dark streets, ambiguous rites, abandoned stages ... creaking machines of dubious purpose ...'



Academic Distinctions

John Russell Taylor

Photographs:
Tom Picton

Linocut posters and *Les Enfants du Paradis*, with Olivier/Shakespeare as a holiday treat. Whatever the insufficiencies of such an image, it does cover pretty well what most people would conjure up at the mention of The Academy—even long after it became plural. And the picture does seem, at least, to carry with it the right atmosphere: something like that of a high-toned film society in the days before the land was scattered with regional Film Theatres, and when nothing more Frenchified than Roger Manvell's *Film* was the intelligent layman's bible. No doubt the image, and the warm and comfortable feeling it evoked in the middle-aged, was why the Academies lasted so long into an alien world. No doubt, also, it was in a large measure why they did not last longer.

Of course, the image is insufficient. We should not forget that the Academies were the first to show Bergman in Britain, and Wajda, and Ray, and Jancsó. They gave a good, if not quite first, home to Antonioni and many of the French New Wave, and were quick to tune in on exciting new happenings in Czechoslovakia and Hungary and Australia. All the same, they have been subsidised to the tune of £1 million or so in the last ten years, mainly from the lucrative uses to which other parts of the building have been put. And the truth is that during those ten years they have been coasting along more on nostalgia than anything else, since though the standards of presentation were always exemplary, the films were not necessarily, were they, all that good... Of course, you could also observe that neither were most of the films that their main competitors were showing. And in a world where the 'perfect film for the Academy' is getting harder and harder to find, it does not exactly help that there are so

many others looking for precisely the same thing.

And how big an audience would this 'perfect film' bring in nowadays anyway? Consider Eduardo de Gregorio's *Aspern*. A perfect film for the Academy if ever there was one: solid literary base, well acted, good-looking, intelligent script, nice atmospheric direction. Not a masterpiece, certainly, but a really good evening out for those with sensible, conservative

tastes, or a pleasant interlude in shopping at Liberty's. And yet, nobody came. Ivo Jarosy, last impresario of the Academies, says that *Aspern* marked the moment when he really began to feel that the struggle to keep the cinemas going was hopeless. The old familiar audience was still around, but it was almost certainly at home, sitting in front of its television.

Funnily enough, it is not the potential



audience for Indiana Jones movies or *Out of Africa* that has been hit by television so much as those who like a good story well told, and are not averse to seeing it with subtitles. On the negative side, they are getting too old and frail and frightened to go out after dark; on the positive side, they are being very well catered for in their own homes, and are not so silly as to fail to note that most of the films they might labour out to see at an Academy now will, like *Chaos*, be on the box, not in a matter of years, but of months or even weeks.

So, the Academies finally closed their doors at the beginning of April. It must be difficult for anyone not around London thirty years ago to imagine the special awe in which they were once held, though some of the glamour lingered on to the end. The awe in which it was held, I should probably say, since the days of the Academy's unique distinction date back to the 1940s and 50s, when there was only one of them. It was built in 1913, as the Picture House, and coasted along like many another cinema, changing its name to the Academy in 1928, until by the end of the 1920s it was doing so badly that the owners proposed—strange augury of things to come—closing it and turning it into a shopping arcade. But that was where the powerful but rather mysterious figure of Elsie Cohen came in.

Elsie Cohen came out of the original Film Society, that astonishingly influential concern which introduced almost everybody of note in the Hitchcock/Bernstein/Montagu generation of the British cinema to the foreign wonders of film-as-art, with a burning conviction about the mission of the art house and its commercial viability for something much wider than the limited club audience. She had run Britain's first art house for a year in the retrospectively improbable venue of the Windmill, then known as the Palais de Luxe; but when that closed in 1930 for conversion to the familiar shape and title which *Never Closed*, she was looking for somewhere else, and managed to talk the owners of the Academy into letting her try out her policies there. So great was her success with a glittering array from the backlog of notable silent films up to then never publicly shown in Britain, that they kept right on showing for months after every other London cinema had converted to sound.

Throughout the cinema's life as an art house, it was run by a succession of only three benevolent despots: Elsie Cohen, George Hoellering and Ivo Jarosy. The succession was smooth: George Hoellering came into the operation to assist Elsie Cohen in 1937, and took over as managing director in 1944; Ivo Jarosy assisted George Hoellering, his stepfather, for years before taking over in his turn at Hoellering's death in 1980. Elsie Cohen seems to have been cut from the same bolt of cloth as the Old Vic's Lilian Baylis, Manchester's Miss Horniman and other of those intrepid ladies who pushed through their plans for British theatre in the earlier years of the

century; though she seems to have been the only one who took up cinema. She had strong ideas on what constituted quality, and famously introduced films like *Kameradschaft*, *Mädchen in Uniform*, *Le Dernier Milliardaire* and *La Grande Illusion* to the British public. Clearly her tastes—liberal and literary—were shared by George Hoellering, though he also brought in the speciality of Carné-Prévert with *Quai des Brumes* (he was a great friend of Prévert) and pushed Pagnol, both at the Academy and at the Berkeley, just off Berkeley Square, which he and Elsie Cohen programmed for eighteen months in 1938-39, their greatest success there being *La Femme du Boulanger*.

Of course, Hoellering came into the business with a special clout as an established film-maker in his own right, with *Hortobagy* (1936), the epic of horses on the Hungarian plains, to his credit. Also, as befitted someone who had commanded a detachment at the funeral of Franz Josef (his commanding officer was too drunk at the time), he had military ideas of discipline and efficiency, and would certainly not hesitate to suggest a little re-editing to even the most august

directors if he felt their films dragged: he re-edited this way two of Feyder's later films, *Les Gens du Voyage* and *Une Femme Disparaît*, and even dared to tell Dreyer that *Day of Wrath* could do with some tightening up, to which Dreyer unexpectedly agreed. (True, Hoellering had worked with Dreyer in Berlin on *Vampyr*: when Dreyer insisted on even developing his own film, Hoellering turned the handle . . .)

The war played its part in the history of the Academy by closing it for four years with bomb damage and by shattering Elsie Cohen's health, so that when the cinema reopened in 1944 Hoellering alone was in control. His policies were very much a continuation of those that had obtained prewar. Except that, curiously, the Academy's position was strengthened by the disappearance of most of the prewar competition: just after the war, the Curzon was almost its only serious rival for the kind of films it sought. Surprisingly, it was not the first British cinema to show *Les Enfants du Paradis*, indissolubly linked with the film as the Academy subsequently became. Even more surprisingly, Ivo Jarosy's devotion to *Drôle de Drame*,



which he continued to urge on Hoellering every ten years or so from the war on, did not pay off until the very last screening. At its previous airing the critics were still complaining that the film's Prévert fantasy of London lacked 'authenticity'.

The Academy even managed to survive the onslaught of no less a figure than Alexander Korda, who came to them in 1946 offering first runs of a number of films in which he had some kind of interest. When they agreed in principle, he added that of course he would have to acquire a 30 per cent interest in the house as part of the deal. This was flatly refused, and Korda went off fuming and vowing dire consequences to the Academy when he got his own rival cinema. Fortunately his tenure of the Rialto, though it brought in a few important foreign films, including *Open City*, did not in the event prove any sort of damaging longterm competition.

The most palpable gain during the war was a by-product of Hoellering's period of internment as an 'enemy alien'. In the camp he met an emigré artist called Peter Strausfeld: they got on very well, and when they were both released and the Academy started operations again Hoellering requested him to design some posters. Paper was still in short supply, and the only thing they could find to use was some sort of lightweight cloth. So Strausfeld cut a linoblock based on a still from the film in question, Duvivier's *Un tel Père et Fils*, and

printed it himself on the cloth in an edition of 150 copies. The convention and the size of edition—though not, mercifully, the cloth—were to remain the same up to 1981, when Strausfeld died, having created every single one of the Academy posters during that time. Even after his death the idea and the general style lived on, and the Academy would not quite have seemed the Academy without them, even though they had for long taken on a slightly period air.

This was in its way reassuring, and probably helped to ease old-style patrons into the new-style films as they gradually filtered into the Academy's programmes, but the posters did not really represent the kinds of film which became usual at the Academy towards the end of the 50s, and even more so after the Academy Two opened in the former basement ballroom in 1965 and the Academy Cinema Club (opened upstairs in 1964) became the Academy Three in 1967. The sober, tasteful advertising often seemed at the time to contrast oddly with the experiments of French New-Wavers or even the glancing, elliptical notations of Olmi and early Forman on the screen, but in retrospect it was probably right to stress continuity in the cinema's attitude. After all, what seemed revolutionary around 1960 now falls into a more sensible perspective whereby the new young Turks of the cinema were only doing for their day what the scorned representatives of the 'tradition of quality' had

done in theirs. It was not for nothing that within frighteningly few years *Cahiers du Cinéma* itself was devoting special numbers to Guityry, Pagnol and such.

To all appearance, George Hoellering recognised this well before the rest of us: when the Cannes Festival was closed down by dissidents in 1968, people were babbling of revolution, but Hoellering silenced them magisterially with 'This is not a revolution. I have lived through revolutions.' What were a few obtrusive jump-cuts to such a survivor? Also, his definition of art-house fare was by no means exclusively confined to films with subtitles: every now and then the Academy would catch its audiences off-guard with English-speaking discoveries like *They Live By Night* and *Kes*. In general, right to the end the Academy cinemas were kings of the middle way, catering to the intelligent middle-brow, middle-class audience, especially as it reached middle age. There may be, as Ivo Jarosy says, plenty of cinemas in London now ready to put on anything foreign with the slightest hint of quality, so that the Academies are no longer called for. But there is nothing, really, that caters for the same audience in the same way. Finally, it is the defection of that audience from the big screen that has left the Academies high and dry. Is it only pointless nostalgia which makes one think that even the greatest video library in the world cannot fill the gap theyleave? ■

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Shoah—the title is the Hebrew word for 'Annihilation'—took ten years to complete. It runs in two parts for some nine and a half hours. Its subject is the minutiae of the Holocaust, what occurred, precisely, at Chelmno, Treblinka, Auschwitz-Birkenau and in the Warsaw Ghetto. Archive footage and still photographs are not used, although the camera does linger on some melancholy relics—a jumble of enamelled pots and pans; a pile of suitcases, trustingly identified by their owners; a pit filled with cutlery, tarnished forty years on to the colour of the surrounding ground.

Only one document, an unexceptional railway movement order, is produced as evidence. Raul Hilberg, the historian who decodes it, adds that he particularly values such artifacts. He likes to hold them in his hands because they are tangible proof—among the few tangible proofs to have survived—that communities now obliterated did once exist. This document describes the fate of perhaps 10,000 Polish Jews. It was not marked secret. To have done so would have been to suggest abnormality, and the Holocaust, Hilberg argues, was predicated on a curious, untroubling assumption of normality.

Claude Lanzmann, the director, is eager to hear about such evidence. He later asks for precise clarification as Hilberg describes the content and significance of the diary of Adam Czerniakow, President of the Warsaw Jewish Council, who committed suicide in July 1942, knowing he could do nothing more to save the community he represented. But spoken evidence is what Lanzmann is really after. The survivors of the Holocaust, the victims and the 'functionaries', were traced to Poland, the United States, Switzerland, Germany, Greece and Israel. Their testimony, and the camera's long look at their faces, is the heart of the matter.

During the war, Lanzmann (b. 1925) organised resistance to the Nazis at his Lycée in Clermont-Ferrand. He went on to take a degree in French and philosophy and to teach languages in Berlin between 1948 and 49. A friend of Sartre, he was one of the signatories of the 121 Manifesto against the Algerian War. In the 60s, he worked as a journalist for *Les Temps Modernes*, of which he is now one of the directors; he later switched to filmmaking with the documentary *Pourquoi Israël?*, which attempted to answer the question of how a man committed to decolonisation could defend the survival of Israel. He made *Shoah*, he said, because he was asked. 'I said to myself,' he told Anne Head in an interview for *Screen International*, 'that if I knew nothing about the way the death machine functioned, the film had to be made with nothing . . . from that moment there was a sort of reaction within me, the only way was to make it all be relied on condition that I, too, was involved.'

What the witnesses have to say—the victims, that is: the functionaries have never previously been tricked into quite such unguarded public reminiscence—has been heard before, but not in quite this way or with quite this impact.

JOHN PYM

(Hundreds were interviewed; there were some 350 hours of rushes; the aim was for a certain sort of definitiveness.) Why? The answer lies principally in Lanzmann's approach to interviewing. He prefers, first of all, to speak direct to his subjects. Including French, he has a command of four European languages, and what he sometimes lacks in fluency he makes up for in confidence. He cannot speak Greek, but, in questioning a survivor of the Jewish community of

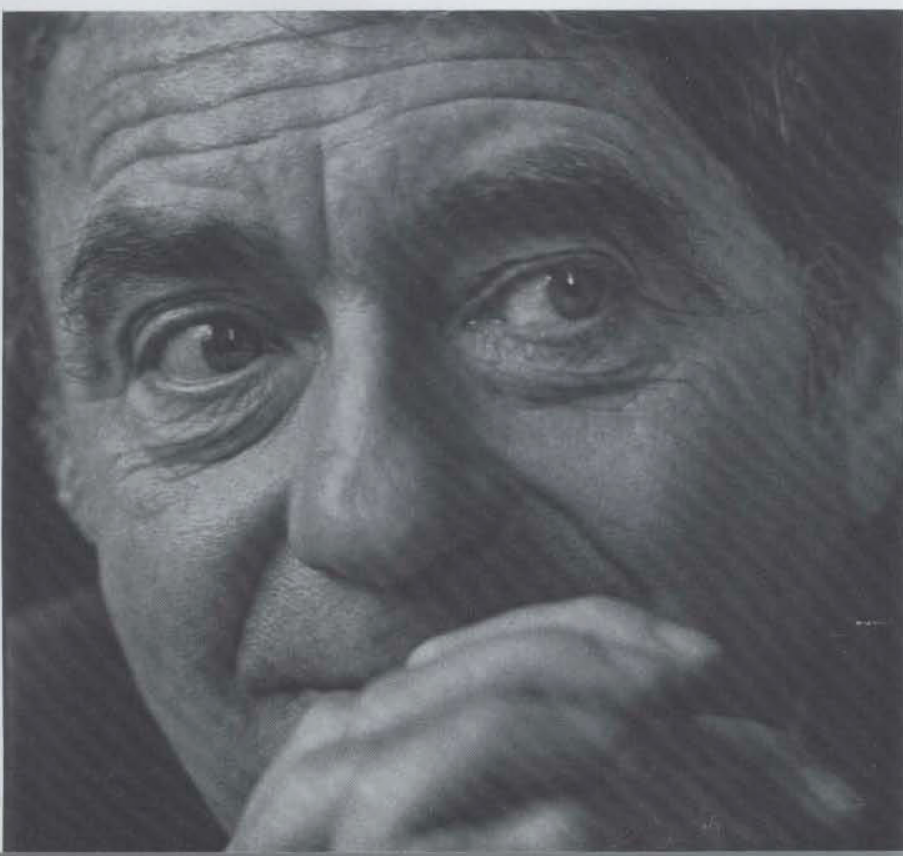
Corfu, he favours a common third language, Italian, rather than the services of an interpreter. When an interpreter is unavoidable—he has, apparently, no Polish, Hebrew or Yiddish—he listens attentively to the original language and occasionally, if he feels there has been an omission, will sharply tax the translator about exactly what was said or implied. (On film, we see and hear most of these three-cornered conversations.) Once, to save time, his Polish translator Barbara Janica answers one of his supplementary questions without consulting the witness. 'No,' Lanzmann insists, 'ask him.'

Lanzmann does not look like a professional interviewer, nor for much of the time does he conduct himself like one; which is, perhaps, just as well, for he is probing for deep secrets. He is large, stooped, earnest and slightly unkempt; to hide his feelings he sometimes looks away from his subject. Passion never gets the better of him, although he does very occasionally allow himself an ironic aside. He avoids or appears to avoid the impression of interviewing against the clock, even when talking in their own homes to former members of the SS, whom he is secretly filming, and with whom he could not, presumably, afford to linger indefinitely. He often lets a silence hang until it is filled by the witness. He is a good listener, but he is also—when it is time to strike—capable of laying aside his natural sympathy and asking the hard question or, as twice occurs, refusing to turn off the camera.

The testimony he elicits is harrowing, comprehensive and relentless. Each witness has a different perspective, and there is in the end very little repetition. The evidence is most telling when it is corroborated, if only in small matters. At one point, for instance, Lanzmann asks the German widow of the Nazi schoolteacher of Chelmno (she had gone East a youthful pioneer: the reality had been somewhat daunting) about a manacled boy prisoner. He was a familiar sight in Chelmno. Did she remember one of the Prussian military songs his captors had taught him and which he used to sing? Her face lights up—of course, and she completes the line Lanzmann has begun.

Earlier, we have seen this boy, Shimon Srebnik, once a child of the Lodz ghetto, now a solid, middle-aged Israeli. Lanzmann persuaded him to return to Poland, and the film opens with Srebnik seated in the prow of a flat-bottomed boat being rowed down the river Narew—as he was rowed years ago to gather alfalfa for the rabbits kept by his guards—singing a Polish folk tune. (Of the 400,000 who were destined to perish at Chelmno—the schoolteacher's widow cannot remember the exact number. 'Four something . . .'—Srebnik and one other, Mordechai Podchlebnick, whom Lanzmann also questioned, were the only survivors.) Srebnik, too, has not forgotten the Prussian song. He sings it, liltily, to camera. The widow's face lights up with pleasurable remembrance; a sadder, more rueful smile plays across Srebnik's features.

Claude Lanzmann. Photo: Sylvia Plachy.



The victims of the Holocaust have repeated their stories many times. But here the effect of this accumulated evidence, related with surprisingly little rancour and balanced against, say, the disinterested recollections of a Polish farmer who worked (and still works) the fields near Treblinka or of a railway engineer who, well fortified with vodka, drove the transports into the camp, is to build a more complete and many-sided picture than we have had before, at least on film. Lanzmann and his chief editor, Ziva Postec, have given the documentary a tone of calm dispassion. The pace is stately and unhurried: we must in a sense make the river journey before we reach the heart of darkness.

The overlapping chronicles are intercut and framed with judicious repetitions and illustrative juxtapositions. The trains—the same trains, it seems, are still in service—shunt back and forth, again and again, along the same tracks, through the same stations. A railwayman at Treblinka crosses the track with Lanzmann and points with a stick: Here the fence ran. We repeatedly approach the entrance of Auschwitz or circle over the great arc of jagged memorial stones at Treblinka. A witness describes the last journey of the victims of Auschwitz and the camera travels along a plaster model, in the camp museum, of the way stations on the route to death. Unlike Treblinka, much of Auschwitz still stands: the red-brick buildings, the execution wall, the crematoria; the ruined steps leading to one of the gas-chambers and the perimeter fence under whose no longer electrified strands hares now lope.

The uniqueness of *Shoah* does not, however, lie here. The entrance of Auschwitz is, after all, an outline almost as familiar as that of the Eiffel Tower. The Holocaust has its historians: the Germans were punctilious record-keepers and, as Martin Gilbert has recently demonstrated, we have if not the names then at least the numbers. No, what distinguishes *Shoah* is its subtext: the story told by a man's face.

The deputy of Auerswald, the Nazi commissioner of Warsaw, was one of the few functionaries whom Lanzmann succeeded in talking to openly. Since the war this man has been a publisher of mountaineering books. Lanzmann reminds him of his past by quoting a reference to him in Czerniakow's diary. Is that so, the man says, may I note the date—this is my history, you know. One senses that he already realised it was unwise to have granted the interview. The man's nervous annotations, the manner in which he leans towards Lanzmann, the fixed, uneasy smile on his rounded features tanned by the mountain sun, say far more about the nature of forgetfulness than his stonewalling replies. 'Mr Lanzmann, this is getting us nowhere.' At one point he makes a slip, referring to Auerswald's instead of Czerniakow's suicide.

Film-makers can, of course, if they choose, make men into monkeys. Lanzmann, however, is not interested in



Rudolf Vrba: on the suicide of Freddy Hirsch.



Shimon Srebnik: the church at Chelmo.



Filip Muller: on the threshold of the gas-chamber.

scoring points off the functionaries. The enormity is too huge and the hour too late. He lets their half answers stand. The mountain air, he observes in closing, must be fresher than that in the Warsaw Ghetto. Oh, yes, Auerswald's deputy agrees in relief, believing himself off the hook.

The first and most striking feature of the Jewish witnesses is that, in their very different ways, they all look like survivors. They have, of course, grown into middle age, but in several of them experience seems to have slowed down the aging process. They are survivors in the way that generals of whatever army are generals: their presence commands attention. Shimon Srebnik has the least to say. He is erect and slow moving, his face betrays little. Lanzmann took him to Chelmno and placed him in a curious, welcoming crowd outside the Roman Catholic church. It was here thousands of Jews were gathered before being herded into the gas-vans, the forerunners of later, more sophisticated methods of mass extermination. Srebnik stands quietly in the midst of this jabbering, excited throng (he is something of an exhibit), occasionally looking from side to side and nodding if he appears to be in agreement with what had been said.

A rather forced example of documentary reconstruction, it might be thought; and sure enough, the scene is punctuated with an antisemitic outburst, all the worse for being an unwitting antisemitic outburst—'It wasn't me who said these things [that the extermination of the Jews was retribution for the death of Christ], but a rabbi, about to die, addressing his congregation . . .' But one is compelled against the hubbub to wonder just what thoughts must be running through Srebnik's mind. He was thirteen years old when he was taken, an orphan, from Lodz to Chelmno. Really, he said, all he had ever known was death: death rather than life seemed the natural order of things. Perhaps, if he had been older, he would have thought differently, he would have been affected by the tasks the Nazis set him. This disclaimer is half the story. His watchful face outside the church is the other half. In Chelmno now, silence and the smiling nod is the most politic behaviour for a Jew.

Shimon Srebnik survived by chance. As the Russians advanced, he was shot in the head and left for dead. The bullet missed his brain and a Soviet doctor saved his life. Rudolf Vrba, who was saved from execution of another kind and set to work as a registrar at Auschwitz, where there was a large group of non-Jewish prisoners, saved his own life. Of all the witnesses, he is the one whose demeanour, whose frank, ironic smile, whose precise, organised speech, would lend support to the theory that some people, given the circumstances, are innate survivors. Vrba tells the story of the Theresienstadt 'family group' which was kept at Auschwitz for an unprecedented six months before being exterminated in March 1944, and

of how on the day before they were due to die he helped prepare for a coordinated rebellion in the camp. The story is involved and dramatic. It ends with the attempted suicide of one Freddy Hirsch, the leader of the family group, who, for fear of what would happen to the children under his care, according to Vrba, chose suicide over revolt.

Vrba tells this story with a notable sense of his own detachment from it, even though he was it seems, in the role of go-between, one of the leading participants. A month after the extermination of the Czech family group, Rudolf Vrba, concluding that a rebellion was impossible, made a successful escape. It was a logical decision, reached only after he had tried, as far as he was able, everything else. Vrba speaks in English; after the war, it appears, he emigrated to North America and, judging from what we see, made a success of his life. All of which decisively colours his story. On the page it would have read very differently.

Jan Karski, a former courier for the Polish Government in exile, and now a university professor in New York, puts the reason for this concisely. He was asked by Warsaw's Jewish leaders to inform the world of the plight of the ghetto and the fate of Europe's Jews. One of those who urged him to undertake this mission—and, Professor Karski adds, this lodged in his mind—said that his testimony would carry far greater weight when he spoke to those in power far from Poland, if he could assert 'I saw this with my own eyes.' He therefore visited the ghetto and was utterly appalled by what he saw.

He is the most reluctant of Lanzmann's 'sympathetic' witnesses, at the start of his interview he loses his nerve and with the camera running gets up and leaves the room. Yet when he begins his testimony, which he delivers with a damped-down but ever increasing emotion somewhat at odds with his cool, aristocratic bearing, one can see the infernal spectacle (which he has not spoken about for thirty-five years) swimming up before his clear, watery-blue eyes. Retracing his walk through the Warsaw Ghetto and describing what he cannot forget, Professor Karski brings us, in 1986, as close perhaps as we shall ever get to a re-experience of the Holocaust. Such is the intensity of his involvement in the story that he seems at times about to become lost in silent reverie, until Lanzmann skilfully jogs him back into the present.

There is, however, one survivor who stands out from the rest. Filip Muller is a Czech Jew. He worked in the 'special detail' at Auschwitz, in the crematoria and on the threshold of the gas-chamber, and survived five liquidations or periodic changes of the special detail. He has a melodious voice and as he gives his testimony, quietly and intently, he varies his pitch (for expressiveness, he is equalled only by Rudolf Vrba). The climax of his story is the murder of the Theresienstadt family group, who were exceptional because unlike almost all

the thousands who preceded them they knew, as they were forced into the undressing room, exactly what fate awaited them. One can see the vision before Filip Muller's eyes as he describes the extreme brutality with which they were treated and the refusal of some to obey orders. What makes the evidence of Jan Karski and Filip Muller so uniquely poignant and meaningful is that we are watching men not just telling a harrowing story but in a sense sending themselves back into the past.

Up to this point in Filip Muller's testimony, he has shown no sign that he is not completely in control of himself. But now he breaks off. Lanzmann will not turn off the camera. The victims, fellow Czech Jews, he goes on, began to sing, the Czech National Anthem and the 'Hatikva'. He then realised that his life had lost its meaning, and that all he had borne up to then had been for nothing. He stepped into the gas-chamber resolved to die. But a group of women dissuaded him. His death would be futile. He must live and bear witness. Retribution of a sort, as we know, was taken. Many years later, Claude Lanzmann has given Muller his moment to bear witness in another, more lasting fashion.

Shoah is not above politics. It passes some harsh judgments on antisemitism in present-day Poland, indeed a showing at the National Film Theatre in London earlier this year was leafleted by protestors claiming Lanzmann had traduced the Poles. Though these judgments, it should be noted, are offset by Professor Karski's evidence of how some Christian Poles did attempt to do something for their Jewish fellow countrymen. The Germans, from the widow of the teacher of Chelmo to one of the Treblinka guards (Lanzmann asks him to sing the 'Treblinka Song' a second time, louder, for the benefit of the hidden microphone), display a chilling complacency. One knows, by the end, exactly where Lanzmann stands: he names the functionaries (even going so far as to assure one of them that, of course, he will not); and he is not above reminding us that Saurer, the firm that built the gas-vans of Chelmno, is still in business.

The war and the fate of the Jews will not go away, as—to take three random examples—the 'confirmation' of Josef Mengele's death, the uproar over President Reagan's visit to the Bitburg cemetery and the revelations of the shrouded war record of the former Secretary-General of the United Nations have recently confirmed. But Lanzmann's purpose, and this is where his monumental film differs from all previous films about the Holocaust, has been to explain *how* this awesome tragedy occurred (the why is another question altogether), to honour its victims and then, perhaps most importantly, to draw a line. He leaves us at the end of nine and a half hours gazing at a huge, detailed, unforgettable canvas. Its cautionary moral, of course, is beware lest this happen again: there may not be a Filip Muller then to step back from the jaws of death to bear witness to the next generation. ■

POLISH CINEMA

Tomasz Warchol

The End of a Beginning

The late 1970s in Poland witnessed the birth of perhaps the most fascinating political and artistic movement in the history of postwar European cinema, a development which ended abruptly with the imposition of martial law on 13 December 1981. Between 1977 and 1981, a new generation of film-makers, all in their late thirties or early forties, created a stylistically and thematically distinctive series of films which, after years of mediocrity under Gomulka's crude and tight cultural policies, became testimonies to the atmosphere of social and political unrest and moral indignation that slowly began to pervade Polish society. Never before had Polish films attracted so much popular attention. Never before had the fate of the cinema tied itself so inseparably to the

fate of the nation. Film in these years became the mirror, the conscience and the educator of Polish society.

Most of the new directors began in documentary before making their first features. This apprenticeship was a

Tomasz Warchol, a Polish émigré teaching in the United States, assesses the films of the pre-martial law years (1977-81); and Edward Rogerson, an Englishman who has made a study of Polish culture and language, offers a personal reaction to some key films made after 1981.

Marek Piwowski's Cruise (1970): satire without a script.

conscious choice, since only in that narrowly distributed genre could the young film-makers express their concerns relatively freely and avoid heavy censorship. These years allowed them frequent contact with the working class, made them acutely aware of various manifestations of social injustice and political corruption and repression. Although not overtly political, their films condemned the system indirectly by demonstrating without comment its hypocrisy, illegitimacy and inefficiency. These documentaries naturally affected the style of the new directors: the form of their feature films is quite plain, the content realistic and objective, the narrative straightforward and linear. The plot develops largely by way of a dramatic dialogue, with an individual or



group on one side and the institution/system on the other. The films record the conflict through a series of confrontations, predominantly verbal rather than physical. In almost all cases the directors relied on their own scripts, a situation which led Andrzej Wajda, the spiritual father of the group, to say, in an interview for *Cinéaste* in February 1980, that, 'The best literature in Poland today is found in screenplays. Nearly all the best films in recent years are original stories for the screen.'

The signs of the emerging movement can be traced to the early 1970s. In 1972 film units, which were established under pressure from the film community during the thaw of 1956, won some significant independence over their productions. Although the scripts still ultimately needed the approval of the Ministry of Culture, the new regulations enabled the units to manipulate the budgets to promote the younger talents and worthwhile films.

One of the most significant sources of inspiration for the new generation was (and still is) the work of Krzysztof Zanussi. Zanussi's career began in the late 60s, earlier than that of his peers who represent the new movement. It was marked by the success and international recognition of such films as *Structure of Crystals* (*Struktura Kryształu*, 1969), *Behind the Wall* (*Za Scianą*, 1971), *Illumination* (*Iluminacja*, 1972) and *A Woman's Decision* (*Bilans Kwartalny*, 1974). In all these films, Zanussi focuses on the conflict between his young, sensitive and morally idealistic characters and the corrupt and indifferent system. Even though the protagonist's search for a meaningful relationship and a realisation of his/her ideals often ends in frustration and isolation, Zanussi's character never gives up or bends ethical principles. Repeatedly, Zanussi insists that man's best protection against corruption, dishonesty and injustice is his own moral conduct founded on truth, will-power and love. Such a moral stance informs all the films of this generation.

Stylistically, however, Zanussi's films stand on their own. His microscopic laboratory exploration of the mental states of his protagonists, and his subjective involvement in their fates, sharply contrast with the more aggressive, objective and detached tone of the new-generation movies. Zanussi's quiet tone avoids radical political statements and seldom touches on the sensitive social issues that often characterise the cinema of 1977-1981.

Marek Piowski, virtually unknown in the West, also played a major role in shaping the new movement. *Cruise* (*Rejs*, 1970), his memorable first feature, is a clever and very bitter satire on the ideology and meaningless rituals of the communist regime. Shot without a script to avoid government censorship, and set on a steamboat going down a river, with much of the action improvised by the leading Polish comedians, the film metaphorically portrays the impotence of the system by concentrating on its

pathetic and absurd efforts to carry on a pseudo-relationship with an indifferent society. *Cruise* had a lot of problems with the censors, despite its release during a brief 'thaw' following the cruelly suppressed shipyard strikes of 1970. Wherever it was shown, it attracted thousands of people, mostly students for whom it soon became a special kind of 'cult' movie. The Polish context of *Cruise*, however, makes it largely inaccessible to Western viewers.

Piowski's other important film, *Foul Play* (*Przepraszam, czy tu Bija*, 1976), is a crime drama which, for the first time, showed Warsaw's underworld of drug addicts, pimps, prostitutes and criminals, and exposed the immoral and brutal methods of the militia (the two officers were played by Poland's leading boxers and Olympic champions). *Foul Play* stands as a rare example in Polish cinema of a fast-paced, action-packed film.

In the late 70s Piowski was effectively pushed aside after several of his scripts had been heavily censored and then rejected. His original talent for black humour and the absurd has been wasted in his fruitless, endless efforts to fight back against the unyielding bureaucracy. He gave the new movement its natural directness, its satirical edge, its technical professionalism.

The green light for the restless young film-makers came with the appearance of Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Marble* (*Człowiek z Marmuru*, 1977). In that powerful story of Birkut, a simple bricklayer who is manipulated and eventually destroyed by the Stalinist system, of a man who persistently refuses to participate in the brainwashing ideological indoctrination and the absurd and meaningless collective rituals of the regime, millions of Poles vividly saw what they had always known but could not openly talk about. Despite its controlled and limited distribution (it was released again under Solidarity), *Man of Marble* became the

Zbigniew Zapasiewicz in Wajda's *Rough Treatment* (1979).



most popular, privately most talked about film of the postwar period, although officially it got only two or three dismissive party-line reviews. Both artistically and thematically, *Man of Marble* remains the best political drama to come out of the Eastern bloc.

As art director of film unit 'x' and later President of the Polish Film-makers' Association (after 1978), Wajda helped many young directors who began their careers under his supervision and protection, aided by his international prestige. With his bold indictment of Stalinism and the current regime in *Man of Marble* he broke the wall, created the precedent, setting an example for others to follow. At that time, none of the younger directors could have taken such a dangerous step without damaging their careers. Aleksander Scibor-Rylski's script had been ready for many years, and Wajda cleverly took advantage of the political climate when the first signs of a deep division within the Party became apparent following the 1976 events in Radom. The growing economic and political crisis, the formation of KOR (Committee for the Defence of Workers) and the strengthening of the opposition all promised a period of liberalisation in cultural policies that the film-makers could not ignore. The end of *Man of Marble*, where a young film director (Krystyna Janda) and Birkut's son, a worker at the Gdansk shipyard, walk arm in arm to confront the relentless and corrupt bureaucracy, was symbolic of the new role Polish cinema was to play in the life of the nation; symbolic also of the finally attained union and solidarity of workers and artists that bore fruit in August 1980. The roles of Birkut and his son were superbly played by Jerzy Radziwiłłowicz, the actor whose complete identification with the characters made him a living legend.

After *Man of Marble*, Wajda made *Rough Treatment* (*Bez Znieczulenia*, 1979), a Kafkaesque drama of a famous journalist's fall from grace. In this, probably his most depressing film, we witness the swift process of an administrative reduction of the protagonist to a non-person carried out by some 'anonymous' authority and its loyal institutions. The hero's personal problems only intensify the incomprehensible tragedy, and the spectator leaves the theatre paralysed with impotent rage and fear that the same might also happen to him. The message and mood of *Rough Treatment* resemble that of such American political dramas as Pakula's *Parallax View* or Arthur Penn's *Night Moves*, although the American protagonists are far more active and confident than their Polish counterpart in opposing impenetrable, mercilessly repressive organisations.

Krzysztof Zanussi did not rest on his laurels but tuned into this new, direct dialogue with society in *Camouflage* (*Barwy Ochronne*, 1978), his best film to that date. Set at a linguistic summer conference for students, the movie focuses on the conflict between a

promising young assistant, full of ideals and optimism, and an associate professor who hides his real identity behind a convenient mask of cynicism and conformity. Through his young hero, Zanussi attacks the academic community for intellectual sterility, lack of moral values and spiritual inertia. The students do not come off much better. They are easily manipulated, naive, rather irresponsible and immature. Reluctantly released by the Ministry of Culture, *Camouflage* had a great impact on the radicalisation of students and younger intellectuals. Zanussi's *The Constant Factor* (*Constans*) and *The Contract* (*Kontrakt*), both made in 1980 and well known abroad, confirmed his growing social commitment.

The leading figure in the new movement was Krzysztof Kieslowski, director of the critically acclaimed *Camera Buff* (*Amator*, 1979). The peaceful, slow-paced, organised life of a young man from a provincial town changes dramatically when he buys a film camera to record the first days of his new-born baby. As the only owner of a camera in the town, he is soon asked to film an anniversary celebration at the factory where he works. The movie then traces his gradual and increasingly critical involvement in the complex social and political reality, as he becomes more and more aware of the implications of his actions and recognises that his individual creativity and commitment are often in conflict with the demands of hypocritical authorities both in his home town and in Warsaw. The last scene of the movie, in which the protagonist (played by Jerzy Stuhr, the actor whose career came to prominence with the new movement) turns the camera on himself, is a symbolic gesture of self-questioning, the outcome of which remains uncertain. Will the hero choose the dangerous but challenging and intellectually fulfilling road of struggle, sacrifice and commitment to truth, or will he, like many

others before him, compromise, give up and retreat into himself?

A similar moral dilemma ends Kieslowski's earlier, semi-documentary *Personnel* (*Personel*, 1975). The young hero in this stylistically very ascetic film must either compromise his principles and sign a letter denouncing his friend and co-worker or remain loyal to him, thus opposing the silent, passive majority at the risk of losing his job. Will he submit to coercion and manipulation? Again, Kieslowski gives no answer.

In the time of Solidarity, Polish audiences could see Kieslowski's formerly banned *Calmness* (*Spokoj*, 1976), a story of a worker newly released from prison whose experiences have made him vow to stay away from trouble. His new survival philosophy ironically makes him a victim and scapegoat in the conflict between the workers and management of a small plant. In the last scene, unaware that he has all along been a tool in the hands of the authorities, he is beaten up by his fellow workers and left groaning in the mud. Kieslowski's ex-convict is caught hopelessly between the authorities who mercilessly manipulate him and the workers who are unable to identify with his predicament. Could he have played his cards to his advantage? Rather not—his was a no-win situation.

During 1981, soon after the imposition of martial law, Kieslowski was busy completing *Coincidence* (*Przypadek*) and a tv feature, *Short Day's Work* (*Krotki Dzień Pracy*). Both are bitter satires and have been banned, although the Film-makers' Association is now pushing for the release of *Coincidence*. The film is about a train journey, contemplated in three different versions, which, however, never takes place. It symbolically reflects the stalemate confronted by Solidarity. *Short Day's Work* shows us the workers' protest in Radom (1976) through the eyes of a local Party secretary.

Feliks Falk contributed three films to the movement. The first, *Top Dog*

POLISH CINEMA

(*Wodzirej*, 1978), is the story of a ruthless young man who bribes, lies, blackmails and prostitutes himself to secure the key position of showman in a televised New Year's Eve celebration. The speed with which he achieves success is the best evidence of the demoralisation that has corroded the system and society. In the world of *Top Dog* there is no place for honesty, respect or friendship; the main character sacrifices them all for wealth and recognition. In the last scene his former friend hits him across the face for his swinish acts. His is the punishing hand of social and moral indignation. The protagonist of *Top Dog* (played again by Stuhr) is one of the most morally repulsive figures in Polish cinema of the 70s.

In Falk's second major film, *Chance* (*Szansa*, 1979), the central theme is a conflict between two highschool teachers who represent radically different concepts of education. One is an aggressive, authoritarian P.E. instructor who wants to promote himself through the achievements of the team he coaches; the other, a liberally minded, open but passive history teacher (played by Stuhr). The conflict soon changes into a battle over the soul of one specially gifted student, and the tragedy occurs when that student, unable to resist the pressures of the school and the demands of the more and more influential coach, commits suicide. The history teacher, left almost alone, acts too late to save the boy. Falk's film defends the fragile humanist tradition against ruthless totalitarianism, showing how easily passive conformity leads to a consent to authoritarian rule.

Falk's *And Then There Was Jazz* (*Był Jazz*), completed three months before martial law, remained virtually unknown to Polish audiences. Shown at the Polish festival in Gdansk in September 1981, it focuses on a group of young people in the Stalinist 50s who clandestinely play and listen to jazz. The film was eventually released by the authorities, although how much of the original was cut is hard to determine.

Agnieszka Holland, who co-scripted *Rough Treatment*, is mainly remembered for her *Provincial Actors* (*Aktorzy Prowincjonalni*), made in 1979. The film portrays a troupe of provincial theatre actors dissatisfied with a monotonous existence which shows no prospects for the advancement of their careers, for the fulfilment of their dreams and ambitions. The arrival of a young director from Warsaw to stage Wyspianski's *Liberation* (*Wyzwolenie*), a patriotic play of the 1830 insurrection against Czarist Russia, is welcomed with great expectations. As it turns out, however, the provincial actors have no say in the production. They become puppets in the

Idealism: Krzysztof Zanussi's *The Constant Factor* (1980).



hands of the Warsaw director, for whom the play is merely a necessary, because required, step in his artistic career in the capital. He has even brought along a friendly critic (Stuhr), who will write him a favourable review. Enthusiasm for the play quickly dies out. The essential and politically valid fragments of Wyspianski's text are deleted and the whole is dressed in sham avant-garde convention to create a spectacular but shallow performance. There is no 'liberation' for the provincial actors. The protest of the main character affects no one. Life returns to its routine, depressing and sluggish course. The shocking thing about Holland's film is the atmosphere of hopelessness, utter frustration, spiritual stagnation it conveys. No other Polish film of the late 70s depicts 'socialist' reality in such monochromatically 'grey' colours.

Holland's other films, *Fever* (*Goraczka*, 1981) and *A Woman on Her Own* (*Kobieta Samotna*, 1981), were completed during the last months of Solidarity. The first, which received the Grand Prix at Gdansk in 1981, is a political drama based on Andrzej Strug's novel *A Story of One Bullet* (*Historia Jednego Pocisku*, 1910), about the Polish underground fighting Czarist oppression. The parallels to the political situation of contemporary Poland are obvious. Holland seems most interested, however, in an analysis of the attitudes of the revolutionaries, of their different ideas on how Poland can, if at all, gain liberation from the Czarist (Soviet) regime. Holland's *A Woman on Her Own* did not get a chance to be released before martial law and is still banned, although it has recently been shown at the Rotterdam Film Festival. Many of those who know the film believe that it will take another cyclic 'thaw' before this depressing but faithful picture of the ordeal of a working woman in contemporary 'socialist' Poland reaches Polish audiences.

Janusz Kijowski's *Index* (*Indeks*), although made in 1977, could not see the light of day until the emergence of Solidarity. It is the story of a rebellious young man expelled from university for his activities in the March 1968 student revolt in Warsaw. Unlike his friends who took part in the demonstrations, he refuses to compromise his beliefs for a settled, quiet existence. Instead, he joins the working class in a search for a more meaningful life. In the course of the film his sincerity is often put to the test, his moral principles contrasted with the hypocrisy and cynicism represented by those people in his life who had already made various deals with the system and conformed to reality. Despite its delayed release, *Index* enjoyed considerable popularity and lost little of its impact. It was easier to identify with the aggressive vitality of the hero than with the mellow, remote purity of the protagonist of Zanussi's *Constans*, with which Kijowski's film shares a theme and message. One can also trace the influence of the American anti-establishment cinema, especially in the style and portrayal of the main character.



Agnieszka Holland's *Provincial Actors* (1979).

Kijowski's second major film, *Kung-Fu* (1979), was even more successful than *Index*. In contrast to Holland's films, it ends optimistically. A promising engineer is dismissed from work on trumped-up charges but finds help among old friends from his student days. The film suggests that a collective group solidarity may be the only effective self-defence against the corruption and injustice of the regime.

Kijowski was a very influential figure in the movement. Apart from directing, he was an editor of Poland's best film magazine *Film na Swiecie*, and from 1977 also a president and co-founder of Young Society in the Polish Film-makers' Association.

Wojciech Marczewski contributed to the movement with *Creeps* (*Dreszcze*, 1981), a horrifying picture of the manipulation of minds and indoctrination methods performed on the young during Stalinism. It can be compared to the Hungarian film *Angi Vera*, made by Pál Gábor, which takes up the same theme and is known in the West. To the surprise of many, *Creeps* is shown in Poland and may be used by the regime as a reminder that things can get

much worse than they already are. Marczewski, who made an impressive feature debut with *Nightmares* (1979), a visually expressive story of a boy growing up in conservative Galicia at the beginning of the century, is one of Poland's major artistic talents.

Filip Bajon is the author of *Pendulum* (*Wahadelko*, 1981), also set in the Stalinist 50s. It tells of a half-mad, half-sane young man who, in an effort to block out the oppressive, omnipresent reality of slogans, coercive propaganda and indoctrination, confines himself to a life in bed, within the four walls of an apartment which he shares with his sister and mother. Bajon's earlier film, *Inspection at the Scene of the Crime*, 1901 (*Wizja Lokalna 1901*, 1980) dealt, in a historical setting, with an open but hopeless rebellion of Polish school-children against German occupation.

Ryszard Bugajski's *Interrogation* (*Przesluchanie*, 1981) also returns, like many other films of this generation, to the despair and humiliation of the early 50s, which has been and will remain one of the many black spots in the regime's history of Poland. The film is a horrifying account of tortures carried out in Stalinist prisons and focuses on the struggles of one woman (Krystyna Janda) to preserve her dignity in dehumanising circumstances. The film has never been released officially, although the script is quite well known in the West (it was first published by the Paris-based *Kultura* and then, in English, in the October 1982 issue of the *New Criterion*). Most recently, Bugajski, during a visit to the United States, showed a smuggled copy of *Interrogation* in Polish community centres in New York and elsewhere.

There are other films that represent the movement, among them Marcel Lozinski's *How to Live* (*Jak Zyc*), made in 1977 but released in 1981, which in semi-documentary style exposes the totalitarian nature of the government-run student organisations of the 70s, and Piotr Szulkin's two important

Ambition: Feliks Falk's *Top Dog* (1978).



POLISH CINEMA

philosophical science fiction films *Golem* (1979, released 1981) and *War of the Worlds—Next Century* (*Wojna Swiatow—Nastepne Stulecie*, 1981), loosely based on Meyrinck and H. G. Wells respectively, which threaten audiences with unsettling visions of a totalitarian future.

The emergence of Solidarity, so emotionally and faithfully depicted in Wajda's *Man of Iron* (*Czlowiek z Zelaza*, 1981), and its fourteen-month existence, had an immediate and powerful impact on Polish culture. Ninety per cent of the people working in the film industry joined Solidarity and held their first Congress as early as October 1980, only three weeks after the signing of the Gdansk Agreements. Important reforms were then passed, such as the film unit director's right to veto the decision of the Ministry of Culture and each unit's financial independence and responsibility for its productions. The regime's two loyal units were dissolved for failure to produce artistically and socially relevant films, let alone profit. Despite acute shortages of film stock and decreasing government budgets, the proposed reforms and the overwhelming support they received from Polish society gave many young directors an opportunity openly to express their ideas.

More than a dozen banned features, some as old as Aleksander Ford's *Eighth Day of the Week* (*Osmy dzien Tygodnia*, 1957) and Jerzy Skolimowski's *Hands Up!* (*Rece do Gory!*, 1967), finally became accessible to a Polish audience. Scores of suddenly released documentaries testified to the film-makers' persistent commitment, despite censor-

ship and intimidation, to a faithful portrayal of the officially non-existent uglier side of 'socialist' reality, the permanent economic and growing political crises.

In the period between 1977-1981, the majority of films dealt with contemporary issues (the abuses and terror of Stalinism as adequate parallels) either openly or implicitly. This was a situation unknown in the history of Polish post-war cinema, which had previously been dominated by adaptations of classical and politically indifferent literature, endlessly rehashed war dramas (with Russians as good guys and our liberators), and officially approved, 'safe' but tasteless and mediocre comedies. The films of the new generation explored and reflected important stages in its social and political education: Stalinism, the 'thaw' of 1956, the student revolt of 1968, the massacre of workers at the shipyards of Gdansk, Gdynia and Szczecin in December 1970 and the establishment of the first free, independent, self-governing trade union in the Soviet bloc in 1980. Above all, however, the films engaged Polish society in a mutually productive political and moral dialogue that helped to integrate and consolidate the nation's dynamic and radical forces. The films fulfilled two functions: an educative one, by identifying the sources of social evils and setting moral standards; and an artistic one, by dressing the important content in an aesthetically mature, though often necessarily simple and direct form.

The losses suffered by Polish culture, stifled under martial law, are substantial and have been specially harmful to Polish cinema. The dialogue between film-makers and society was abruptly discontinued. The list of banned films is still depressingly long, and about 70 per cent of the films mentioned in this article have been put on the shelf. Solidarity—its name, history, ideals—has become an official taboo. Many leading directors and actors, including Wajda, Zanussi, Marczewski, Olbrychski, Radziwillowicz, Falk and Holland,

have decided to work abroad (mostly in France and Germany), at least temporarily. After the imposition of martial law, the film community demonstrated its opposition to the regime by boycotting the official media, isolating collaborators and actively participating in the struggle for their rights and the ideals of the movement. Like many other groups of Polish intelligentsia, the film community has shown a remarkable unity in its defiance of Jaruzelski's junta, despite the official and secret campaign of harassment, intimidation and provocation.

The Polish Film-makers' Association was not dissolved, though for a long time it remained suspended. The Film-makers' Congress held in December 1983 was an inevitable victory for the regime. At a high cost in humiliation, the film-makers decided to save their association in order to protect their ambitious young talents from unemployment and repression, rather than agree to a dissolution and replacement by a puppet, party-loyal organisation (the fate of all other unions). Forced to conform to pressures, Polish film-makers sacrificed much of their independence. The regime's film units were reinstated, Wajda had to resign as President of the Association, censorship became rampant, all reforms gone. In a sense, then, the Association became the only 'original' trade union to have struck a deal with the authorities. But, considering that the entire film industry in Poland is in the hands and under the control of the state, was there a better alternative?

The current situation offers little hope. The regime has effectively discouraged young film-makers from attacking sensitive social and political issues. Rigorous censorship rejects 'controversial' scripts, endlessly delays its decisions and cuts film budgets. The authorities favour, instead, light sex comedies and films about rock concerts intended to pacify the young, and war dramas and literary adaptations to satisfy the old. The few exceptions—films by Kieslowski (*Without an End*, *Bez Konca*), a somewhat incoherent drama about the trial of a worker during martial law (it never mentions Solidarity by name), Zanussi (*A Year of the Quiet Sun*, *Rok Spokojnego Slonca*), Wajda (*Danton*), Kazimierz Karabasz (*A Shadow Is Close By*, *Cien Juz Niedaleko*) and Wieslaw Saniewski (*Surveillance*, *Nadzor*)—are empty concessions of the regime's carrot-and-stick policy (many sticks and almost no carrots).

The period 1977-1981 is a short but fascinating chapter in the history of Polish cinema. To millions of Poles the films of Wajda, Kieslowski, Zanussi, Kijowski, Holland and others became an expression of the nation's aspirations, hopes and potential. The truth learned from these films will be remembered and cannot be officially suppressed. Let us only hope that the collective voice of Polish cinema will soon regain its distinctive national character and its international reputation. □

On the frontier: Zanussi's *A Year of the Quiet Sun* (1984).



Edward
Rogerson

POLISH CINEMA

An Internal Exile?

Polish cinema was one of the wonders of the 1970s. For the intellectual filmgoer, it offered a rare glimpse into a culture which for two centuries has cultivated the art of metaphor as a response to total (and latterly, totalitarian) censorship. For the ideologically committed, a fleeting—if ultimately disappointed—hope that something akin to a genuinely autonomous national Communism, responsive to the cultural traditions of its adherents, could emerge in Eastern Europe. Then came the highly equivocal miracle—Solidarity—and its cruel suppression. As with much else in Polish society, the cinema succumbed to the prevailing climate: under Solidarity, with openly committed work like Wajda's *Man of Iron*; and, with the reimposition of totalitarian repression, through the

restoration of strict censorship and a government funding preference for blandly commercial comedies and adventures. Independent artistic expression retreated to the margins of cultural life, to rediscover Poland's dangerously seductive cultural traditions of metaphor and allegory.

Dangerous, because the cult of metaphor encourages the worst in Polish artistic traditions: intellectually dishonest self-reflection (coming dangerously close to vain self-regard); an overwhelming regard for the particularities of Polishness ('Sarmatism'); a search for meaning in the most unpromising material. Over the years, this has created a peculiarly Polish method of dramatic presentation, which has dogged the cinema no less than the

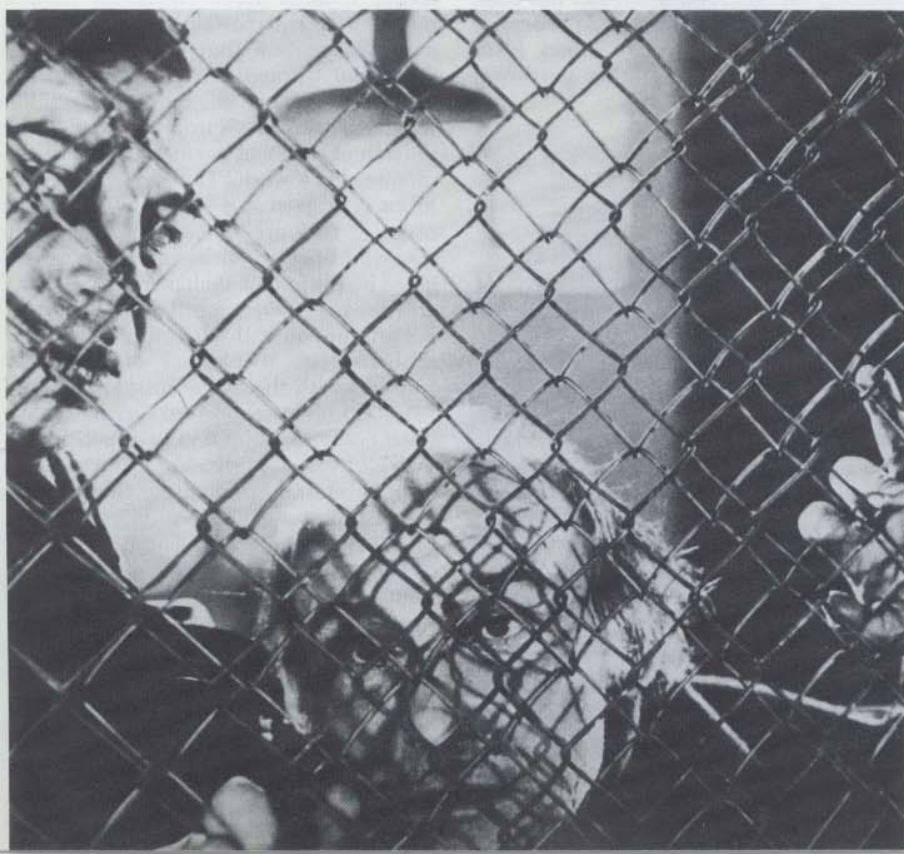
theatre, a method highly mannered and stylised. To be sure, naturalism has never been a strong force in a culture which is still largely reflecting conceptions of Poland evolved in the era of Polish Romanticism. In the dramatic arts, Meaning (frequently stylised and symbolic) often takes precedence over realism, or even over coherent dramatic construction. The cinema's leading performers share with other Polish dramatic interpreters a fondness for the grandiloquent gesture and an exact precision of delivery which I have seen elsewhere only in the vacuum-sealed world of the Comédie Française.

The effect is compounded by the individual styles of a group of leading actors which is small enough to become intimately familiar to the most casual cinemagoer. The whole Polish cinema circuit seems to take on the appearance of a repertory company, with its tiny circle of leading performers moving with ease from one film to another. The dangers of over-exposure are signal: Jan Nowicki, a highly talented and expressive actor, has even made his way to Hungary, to *Diary for My Children* (1984), Marta Meszaros' bleak account of privileged adolescence in Stalinist Budapest. Nowicki has an original talent, with an affinity for character unusual in Eastern Europe; the more one sees of him, the more one wants to see him again. Not so Krystyna Janda, whose inability to come to terms with her natural awkwardness was a distracting element in Wajda's pre-Solidarity films, *Man of Marble* and *Rough Treatment*; after a while, her mannerisms irritate, in some cases dominating one's impressions of the whole film.

Not that a repertory approach is necessarily a bad thing; Janda, Nowicki and the remarkable Jerzy Stuhr spark off each other impressively in Piotr Szulkin's bleak science fiction fantasy, *The End of Civilisation* (1984). In a grim, post-Armageddon world, a handful of survivors are gathered together in a protective anti-fallout dome, controlled by a brutal police regime. Art and literature have been largely suppressed, the authorities preferring to promote an escapist, salvationist pretence of a religion to avert popular discontent. Metaphor abounds: in one particularly clever conceit, film celluloid is being pulped into an edible cake for the masses ('Film quality isn't what it used to be,' observes one character). What the regime can't counter is a fatalism which rejects the false message of salvation but declines to resist, preferring instead to welcome death. The regime, capable of answering dissent with violence, cannot respond to such a challenge. As the dome begins to collapse, so too the regime's authority and self-control disintegrates. In the end, all is reduced to grim survival, the best—but most despairing—hope in a world where even survival becomes a futile exercise in self-delusion.

Armageddon as a metaphor obviously appeals to Polish directors, for the post-nuclear future is redrawn in Juliusz Machulski's *The Sex Mission* (1984)—

Survival: Piotr Szulkin's *The End of Civilisation* (1984).



that rarest of commodities, an inventive Polish satirical comedy. This delightful though slightly over-long film first appeared at the 1984 London Film Festival, went briefly on independent release in 1985, and finally fetched up in Channel 4's Film International. It has to be admitted that the film's obdurately monoglot critics have a point: this is a cheerfully sexist romp through the pretensions of radical feminism, replete with gender elitism and gratuitous nudity. In a postwar age, men have ceased to exist; human society, dominated by the Olive Chancellor strain of feminist, is a single-sex, totalitarian paradise. Eden is breached by two men (Jerzy Stuhr and Olgierd Lukaszewicz), survivors from a prewar cygenics experiment. Their attempts to escape from the female authorities bring them into collision with every possible absurdity of modern life; for, although feminism (or rather, the Polish League of Women) is the principal target, much else is drawn into the fray. At various times, Poland's current malaise is mercilessly dissected: punk rock; clandestine jazz clubs (a throwback to the 1950s, for jazz is today establishment-sanitised); video games. And, underlying the whole structure of the feminist state, news media prone to mendacity and an ideology founded upon a lie.

Machulski's witty farce bubbles with ideas, and critics would do well to learn the language, just to see what they missed out on; it remains to be seen, though, whether Machulski is confident enough to tone down the pace in future works. *The Sex Mission* has a great deal to commend it, and does at least try to alleviate the Polish cinema's over-serious image.

If fantasy science fiction adapts reasonably well to a comic approach, the same is not true of the Stalinist years; indeed, the first decade of People's Poland is still a matter of close concern to the authorities who have, since 1956, failed to resolve their own official attitude to the brutalities of that period. In

effect, for a regime which has adopted the policy that the 'errors' of Stalinism were simply a problem of excess, it is difficult for them to decide where to draw the line—particularly since a significant number among the artistic community use the crimes of Stalinism as a metaphor for Poland's current crisis.

Not the least virtue of Feliks Falk's *And Then There Was Jazz* (1981) is his relentless refusal to draw these invidious parallels. In this meticulous reconstruction of the Stalinist years, Falk traces the struggle of a group of jazz enthusiasts, scarcely interested at all in politics, to find somewhere to perform their chosen music. They gradually realise that their wish to play music redolent of 'imperialist' America is seen by frightened and suspicious officials as deviance almost as criminal as that shown by the unfortunates who are being arrested late at night by unsmiling men in forbidding uniforms. Lack of conformity is its own indictment in a country where the leaders see the entire population as a breeding ground for reaction. Falk shows remarkable attention to detail—the smoky cafés, the soulless apartment blocks, a feel for the sheer tedium of life under Stalinism—while avoiding the Polish traps of metaphor, or historical allusion. Falk creates a world so depressing in its realism that one is reminded of the early works of Marek Hlasko, perhaps the best of the 'anti-socialist realist' writers of the late 1950s. For all this, his film demonstrates how human values can survive even the worst totalitarian excesses. *And Then There Was Jazz* is a moving and surprisingly optimistic story, told with warmth and affection.

Not so *The Shivers* (also known as *Creeps*, 1981), a Wojciech Marczewski film which comes laden with honours from the 1982 Berlin Festival. Its overwhelming sense of its own importance is striking, and its reputation has not been helped by its unexplained disappearance from public view for two years after Berlin. That is to say: this perceived

official martyrdom gives it the sort of cachet likely to appeal to the western film enthusiast.

Nevertheless, the film is not without its virtues. It has powerful narrative drive, and the ensemble acting from a largely juvenile cast is always excellent. *The Shivers* traces the impact of Stalinist indoctrination on a sensitive and intelligent 13-year-old who, at the start of the action, is seen to come from a family faithful to Poland's cultural traditions. Whisked away by a neurotic female Party member to a Scout camp in a crumbling country mansion, he is confronted with a regime which mingles innocuous educational pursuits and political indoctrination. The mansion is, of course, a metaphor for Stalinist Poland, and the pressures on the individuals mirror those inflicted on Polish society at large. Gradually the outside world intrudes brutally upon this claustrophobic setting; for this is 1956, the first indication that the ruling elite had lost its nerve. The tragic ending is genuinely chilling; at the moment when the hero has been turned into a Stalinist parrot, the outside world destroys the camp, in a welter of bitter recriminations and personal conflicts.

In the end, however, the dramatic intensity is simply a compensation in a film which somehow loses its grip. For Marczewski has attempted to create something more than a mere evocation of Stalinism; he sees the film as a study of the conflict between the personal introspection of the leading character and the insistent demands of his wider environment. This is the world of Andrei Tarkovsky; and Marczewski has in fact publicly stated his admiration for this greatest of Russian directors. Indeed, *The Shivers* is awash with images culled from Tarkovsky: the old library of forbidden books; the once grand mansion crumbling into dust; stark avenues of bleak, leafless trees—it is, in fact, a measure of Marczewski's lack of control over his creation that the trees remain autumnal through three seasons of the year. And, above all, insistent running water—Tarkovsky's ironic symbol of the illusion of physical permanence. But the images don't work. Tarkovsky is, above all, a lyric poet whose use of images is precise, the product of an internally consistent poetic world, and Marczewski gives no inkling of such a creative spring within his own emotions. Tarkovsky is an unpolitical director, which is probably the root cause of his bitter conflicts with the Soviet authorities, and his style of introspective lyricism lends itself badly to a film finally so political as *The Shivers*. Regrettably, Marczewski's film, potentially compelling though it is, fails ultimately to carry its convictions to a satisfactory conclusion.

This cannot be said of Krzysztof Zanussi's bleak masterpiece, *A Year of the Quiet Sun* (1984). This deserved success at the 1984 Venice Film Festival is an intensely human tragedy, which largely avoids contemporary parallels, and asks only for honesty in examining the first, cruel winter after the defeat of

Stalinism: Wojciech Marczewski's *The Shivers* (1981).



POLISH CINEMA

Nazi Germany. In a desolate German town, shortly to be handed over to Poland in the postwar settlement, an unlikely love affair develops between Norman (Scott Wilson) and Amelia (Maja Komorowska): he an American army sergeant with the Allied War Crimes Commission; she a guilt-ridden and pious Polish war widow. The painful love affair, between two awkward people, takes place against the background of winter hardship and physical violence as the new Polish authorities, morally no different from the regime they have supplanted, prepare to eject the few remaining Germans from a land which had been theirs for centuries. Intimidation spills over, to afflict the Polish population, desperate for the most part to flee westwards before the frontier is closed. The human passions and jealousies mount irresistibly, in an atmosphere of brooding despair which reflects in the lives of all the characters.

The human drama is powerful, but the film derives its main strength from its intellectual honesty. Zanussi has made a film which passes no open political judgments, tries to avoid the besetting sin of elliptical comment, avoids metaphor, makes no clever 'Sarmatian' allusions: in short, he has made an unpolitical film about a difficult period of history. For this, he has been condemned by the Party-dominated media, for seeing the heroic reconstruction as a simple series of personal tragedies. And, above all, for presenting without comment the brutalities of the 'recovery' of the former German territories—almost, indeed, as an afterthought. The history of the expulsion of the Germans is one of the least known (in Poland; the German Right seems to think of little else) and most discreditable episodes in the establishment of People's Poland. In effect, Zanussi has challenged the Polish people, and their rulers, to accept moral responsibility for the atrocities committed in Poland's name in 1945. In so doing, he has created a masterpiece.

A brief word is in order, too, for the camerawork and the musical score. The camera is used in an imaginative way not normally associated with the Polish cinema: harrowing close-ups; frozen, uncompromising landscapes. The musical score, insistent, thoughtful, is of a quality which would allow it to stand alone.

Wajda, too, has recently returned to the intricacies and passions of small town drama in *A Love in Germany* (1984). It is perhaps a moot point whether a Western European co-produc-

tion can be considered a truly Polish film; but if Poland is, as Mickiewicz would contend, something of a state of mind, then Wajda belongs to Poland. In any case, he returns, in this adaptation of Rolf Hochhuth's famous documentary novel, to the more intimate drama typical of his earliest films. He examines here the impact of wartime conflict on ordinary people whose lives are far removed from the actual fighting. A German peasant woman (a luminous performance from Hanna Schygulla) falls in love with a Polish prisoner of war who is working on one of the farms in a small South German town. Her refusal to bow to social pressure in renouncing him, and his refusal to go along with the attempts by the local Nazis to save face by redesignating him an Aryan, finally brings him to the gallows. The novel was a *cause célèbre* on its publication in Germany, Hochhuth's indignation at the hypocrisy rampant in the episode giving the book an aura of righteous moral certainty which Wajda, on the whole rightly, avoids. What he gives us is a dispassionate picture of the claustrophobia of a small town, where the need to save face is a social imperative which often overwhelms the human emotions of the leading participants. This is as successful an invasion of Chabrol territory as has been seen in recent years.

The trickle of films which has emerged since the imposition of martial law has been thin, and there is no indication that the climate for independent-minded film-makers is likely to improve. So the cinema, dependent on public funds and the goodwill of the censorship authorities, must retreat into the cloudy world of Poland's elliptical artistic traditions if serious issues are to be aired. There have always been ways round the problem: historical allusion, quotations from the Polish classics, dense metaphor—all are weapons available to the film-maker and accessible to the Polish public. The principal danger lies in over-exposure to intellectual acrobatics for the sake of

making an impression. Watching a Polish film is like playing a peculiarly arcane game of literary consequences. A character in a film will quote from Mickiewicz; the audience will murmur appreciatively, because the fact that the quotation is from Mickiewicz, the archetypal Polish Romantic and exile, is almost as important as the appositeness of the quotation itself.

Virtue and vice cohabit, albeit uneasily, the same intellectual space in a Polish dramatic work. Over-brisk metaphor and allusion, if over-indulged, spill over into portentous conceits; like bad Jacobean poetry, the intellectual game overshadows the artistic merit. As a result, too much in the Polish cinema induces a state of apprehension and reduces the filmgoer to the status of an experimental rat in a maze of the director's making. One looks in vain for a sense of proportion.

This is not to deny merit where it is due. All the films discussed here have great merit; even *The Shivers*, although it surrenders to the Polish intellectual game within the first few minutes. Zanussi's film, *A Year of the Quiet Sun*, indeed, may well become, in retrospect, Poland's film classic for the 1980s. But in the end, we are left searching for some sense of proportion, of detachment; for a Polish Schweik, indeed. Perhaps I expect too much; but ironic detachment can be a powerful artistic instrument in handling contentious subjects. Anyone who doubts its potential should seek out the recent Yugoslav film, *When Father Was Away on Business* (1985). Yugoslavia, to be sure, is not Poland (though the Yugoslavs, too, have their own myths to protect); but Emir Kusturica's film, though not without its longueurs and its artistic weaknesses, comes closer than many Eastern European films to exploiting the social comedy, the sheer absurdity, which is to be found even in the tragedy of totalitarian repression. If only the Poles would realise that detached irony need not imply some sort of intellectual sell out. ■

Chabrol territory: Hanna Schygulla in Wajda's *A Love in Germany* (1984).



To Love is to Suffer

Reflections on the Later Films of Heinosuke Gosho

MARK LE FANU



Heinosuke Gosho

Two or three times in the last few years the National Film Theatre has introduced us to forgotten or largely unknown directors who turn out to be major world figures. There were Mikio Naruse and Yuli Raizman in marvellous seasons in 1984; and lately, in March of this year, a chance to see 23 out of the hundred films of Heinosuke Gosho. Not many people, I expect, knew about him beforehand, unless they had read film histories, where he appears under the rubric of 'Gosho-ism', as the leading exponent of a lower middle class slice-of-life drama (*shomin-geki*) that became popular in Japan in the 30s. This description is not, *ipso facto*, misleading; but it is perhaps too constrictive a view of the work of a man who, on the evidence of the films that were shown, is worthy to be placed in the company of Mizoguchi, Kurosawa and Ozu.

These are large claims: exceptionally large. (It is not eccentric to think of Mizoguchi, after all, as the greatest film director of all time.) But confronted with such films as *An Inn at Osaka* (1954), *The Fireflies* (1958), *Mother, Get Married* (1962), *Rebellion of Japan* (1967) or

Dispersing Clouds (1951), I personally falter for definition. When a work of art is perfect there's almost nothing more that can be said. Better, then, to keep it simple. Gosho knows what we are put here on earth for, and can communicate that knowledge transparently.

The films so far mentioned belong to the postwar period. Gosho was also active in the silent epoch. Actually—a pupil of Shimazu—he was one of the pioneers. As with other long-careered directors—Lubitsch, Lang, Hitchcock, Ford, Renoir—the traditions of the silent film can be seen to live on in the mature sound work, giving it speed and economy and density. To sample 23 out of Gosho's hundred films stretching over a forty-year period is inevitably to risk certain unwarrantable generalisations. But seeing the films that were on view is, equally inevitably perhaps, to come up with thoughts about development.

We expect our own contemporary filmmakers, if they are going to get anywhere, to show us their worth by only their second or third movies. And it is not, I suppose, impossible for such a short apprenticeship to be adequate.

(Orson Welles provides an obvious pointer.) But if I speak especially admiringly of the late films of Gosho it is because they possess a sense of ease that can only have been built up over decades of practice. A late film like *Rebellion of Japan* (black and white, CinemaScope, made a year before Gosho's retirement) demonstrates, it seems to me, an authentic mastery of form and transition: impalpable pauses, rhythms within rhythms, flashes of sky and the weather which sum up a mood—a feat of editing, in short, and economy, which, for refinement, has no parallel in contemporary Western cinema.

The fullest account I have come across of the facts of Gosho's life is set out in J.L. Anderson and Donald Richie's article on the director in *SIGHT AND SOUND*, Summer 1956. Gosho was born in 1902. His father was of noble lineage, his mother a beautiful geisha. The father's family belonged to the liberal wing of late Meiji culture, receptive to Western ideals. As well as being wealthy, they were politically democratic. By an alteration of the first character, the grandfather

changed the surname Goshō—previously 'Imperial Palace'—to the more middle-class connotation of 'Five Places' (that is, the five main trading cities of Japan); while Goshō in turn changed his own aristocratic first name Heiueemon to the more modern and unexceptionable Heinosuke. His left-wing ideals (a general sympathy for the underdog) seem to have remained with him through his life.

Groomed by his paternal grandfather to take over the lucrative family tobacco business, Goshō soon slipped, after graduating, into the artistic circles that patronised the kabuki and the nascent national film industry. Against the wishes of his family he became a director. Early success in the silent film (*Lonely Roughneck*, 1927) was followed by a period of personal breakdown. Apparently a beloved brother contracted polio; Goshō's own marriage dissolved; he himself became afflicted by tuberculosis. At a low stage of his fortunes he attempted suicide (but, as he says, he was a failure in this 'as in everything').

For whatever reasons, his period of troubles came to an end. He must have been helped by never having been seriously out of work. Indeed, he appears to have been one of those about whom it is especially said that his life is his work: a hundred films. Hence, only, a certain sadness in his final years. Goshō's last film, *Four Seasons of the Meiji Period*, a puppet drama, was made in 1968; and after that, silence. He lived until 1981. (Anyone who has followed Japanese cinema carefully knows that the conditions of the 1970s were unpropitious for the championing of craftsmanship.)

These, then, are the brief facts of his life, or some of them. For the deeper interior life we have to go to his art, and search there for what one takes to be an autobiographical resonance. Of course one can't be dogmatic, especially from this distance; and, in general, the matter has to be approached with delicacy. But on this question of autobiography, I was struck by the photograph prefacing Anderson and Richie's article, which I took to be a portrait of the director. It is, in fact, the actor Hiroshi Akutagawa, in a still from the film *The Valley Between Life and Death* (1954)—only the likeness is uncanny (which was perhaps the reason it was chosen). By the same token, John Gillett tells me that the puppet grandfather in *Four Seasons of the Meiji Period* is the spitting image of Goshō in old age.

Such references, over a long career, ought not to surprise the viewer. I think we can collect a few other things. A number of Goshō's films have idealistic heroes whose idealism goes subtly awry. Was Goshō himself, in character, like the young doctor Minami in *Dispersing Clouds*, who founds a clinic in the mountains for the peasants? Alternatively, was he like the lost youth Hideo in *L'Amour/Caress* (1933) who gives up medical school in order to throw himself, unsuccessfully, into literature? Or was he at different times like both of them? (The figure of the ingenuous and austere



Rebellion of Japan (1967).

idealist recurs in *Rebellion of Japan*.)

Other particularities of Goshō's films: many occur in or near the setting of an inn, where Goshō excels, a bit like Mizoguchi, in bringing to life the bustle and intimacy of beneath-the-stairs female domesticity. (When the inn transforms into a brothel, it is once more the domestic arrangements of the running of the house, rather than the erotic assignments themselves, which preoccupy and fascinate the film-maker.) We can also surmise that he loved spas and luxury. At the same time, by contrast, a notable number of films are concerned with some form of disease. Death and the sick bed are never far distant. In the dramas of private life—*Hunting Rifle* (1961), *Elegy of the North* (1957), *Mother*, *Get Married*—there is a noticeable tolerance of the institution of divorce, viewed calmly and without rancour, as if it were one of the sad facts of life and nothing to get excited about, that men and women will make the wrong choice. (I do not know why it is,

but one feels this latter to be particularly autobiographical.)

A number of films, finally, show a darker side to Goshō's aestheticism. The actor Shin Saburi (Misugi) in *Hunting Rifle* is another of those doubles or shades of the director, brooding mature figures who seem to carry in their faces more than their mere role in the narrative. Misugi is a man who collects valuable vases, grimly unable to see his seduced mistress Saiko except in terms of a precious rare object. In the course of the film (generically, a melodrama) he proffers his young stepdaughter Shoko the somewhat unsuitable gift of an album of nudes painted by Western old masters; a gesture echoed in a contiguous film *Elegy of the North*, where the married architect Setsuo gives a book of photographs depicting the erotic sculptures of Angkor Wat to the young woman Reiko.

Such gifts of books, and talk about them, have an easily deciphered significance in conventional cinema. (Just as

Hunting Rifle (1961).



the hero of Visconti's *Senso* condemns himself by his immersion in Heine, so, for example, in *The Lady from Musashino*, by Mizoguchi, the decadence of the protagonist is established by his passion for Stendhal.) But again, in Goshō, these incidents seem to stand out with a certain striking resonance, as if they were memories, not fantasies; souvenirs of some dark moment of temptation.

No one can look at Goshō's films for long without seeing that he is a consummate director of actresses. The sorrows, the faithfulness, the proud secrets of women are the deep subjects of his drama. In this he joins the great 'feminist' tradition of Japanese filmmaking, along with Mizoguchi, Naruse and Ozu. One puts the word feminist in inverted commas with a certain reluctance; but if one is honest it must be admitted that the values which are being explored and argued for are different—to put it no stronger—than those championed by contemporary Western feminist radicalism. This essay couldn't conceivably be the place to discuss which, if any, of these traditions is the 'right' or 'correct' one; and in any case there are sufficient moments where the two integrate and combine. But equally, it has to be insisted there are other places where Japanese moral customs stand out on their own.

At the centre of the experience of Japanese cinema, of course, is the visual distinction between men and women that is set up by differences of costume. The aesthetic elaboration of the traditional kimono and coiffure carries with it a further differentiating repertoire of gestures. The tightness of the ankle-length skirts, balanced against the precariousness of the sandal (or clog), is responsible for the characteristic gait, half shuffle, half run, of the traditionally clothed Japanese woman: something that ties up in turn with all those other gestures of placation and courtesy—the bending or bowing, the mutual offering of gifts, the taking of a guest's overcoat or umbrella, the folding and putting away of garments, the pouring out of sake or tea—which are familiar to us from countless little cameos.

The commerce is not entirely one way: men too wear costumes; men too bow and pour sake. And, oddly, the formality of costume is not incompatible with what we would normally speak of as intimacy or ease. There are, as everyone knows, no chairs in the Japanese living room; and the alternative kneeling or sitting on floor cushions can't help give the viewer the impression of a curious utopian equality. Thus, in a word, the extreme of formality co-exists, in Japan, with the extreme of informality—a lack of inhibition about touching and falling and exhibiting the curves of the body.

The position of Goshō—and others—on all this seems to me to be neutral. And yet, as far as costume is concerned, one might qualify that, and say that he is certainly not against custom. Two films, indeed, bring out the issue

schematically. In *Hunting Rifle* and *Elegy of the North* a distinction is drawn between a woman who wears traditional costume and a woman who doesn't. In the first film, Saiko, the seduced mistress and a moral centre of the film, is shown always wearing lovely kimonos (emblems of fern and thistle turn her more than ever into an 'object'); while the wronged abandoned wife Midori, asserting her independence, is only seen in European clothing.

Essentially similar, in *Elegy of the North*, is the moral contrast between the troublesome young woman Reiko (who wears the sweater and slacks of the international art movement) and Akiko, the placid calm wife of the man she is trying to seduce, seen always in traditional costume. The distinction is subtle (and I was perhaps wrong to use the word schematic); for all four women, in different ways, are troubled, unhappy and serious. The really deep sympathy of the films seems to me to lie not with the stormy young modernists, but with the 'traditional' women, Saiko and Akiko, who are each shown in their unhappiness as understanding what essentially belongs to them.

This, however, is in a sense merely the surface. One can get to the matter more clearly by concentrating, not on what the characters look like, but on how they feel, express themselves and suffer. The human quality which is at first explored, and finally justified, in these films about women is the religious virtue of faithfulness. Faithfulness either to a man or, more generally, to an ideal (faithfulness, as it were, to these women's own high moral standards). In *Rebellion of Japan*, the heroine Suzuko falls for the protagonist at the moment when, as a young woman, she overhears him say to her shirking brother in a hospital ward: 'A man must go through with what he has started.' This precept of faith (words

memorised, and never forgotten) introduces her to love and to destiny. As in the greatest films of Mizoguchi (*Sansho, Oharu, My Love Has Been Burning, Empress Yang Kwei-Fei*) and of Naruse (*Sounds of the Mountain, Floating Clouds*), what matters is that a human being should have a destiny, no matter what it leads to in suffering.

In *The Fireflies* and *Twice on a Certain Night* (1956), the two heroines, elevated by marriage from the class into which they were born, repay their husbands, through the subsequent vicissitudes of the drama, with a loyalty that is not conceivably 'merited'. Wonderfully lively and intelligent, in their interior selves, they yet measure their lives under the aegis of constancy. The intransigence of such faithfulness pushes these dramas towards genuine tragedy. One qualifying comment needs to be made: Goshō tends to be more open than Mizoguchi and Naruse about whether (and how) the final irrevocable step will be taken. Certain movies do end, tragically, with death or suicide: *Innocent Witch* (about a girl sold into prostitution); *Elegy of the North* (Akiko's death); *Hunting Rifle* (Saiko's); *Rebellion of Japan* (Suzuko's). But equally, some no less serious films (of which *The Fireflies* and *Twice on a Certain Night* are examples) do not. None of the artists just mentioned is in my opinion tainted by determinism. But Goshō, slightly more than Mizoguchi, and very much more than Naruse, seems sometimes prepared to offer a way out.

I use the word determinism loosely, but its resonance is complicated, and worth examining in slightly more detail. In Naruse's *Sounds of the Mountain* (1954) and *Floating Clouds* (1955), women of depth and intelligence are in each case tied to feeble, badly behaving husbands who in no possible way love or appreciate them. In *Sounds of the*

Elegy of the North (1957).





An Inn at Osaka (1954).

Mountain, the woman is finally freed, but on to a vista or perspective (symbolised by a wide, empty park) which leaves it apparent that she thinks her future is hopeless. In *Floating Clouds*, the woman stays with the husband to the end. But it is a lonely death in poverty and exile. In neither case is outside circumstances put forward as the cause of the women's misfortune; yet at the same time one is left unambiguously feeling that in the depth of Naruse's heart he harbours a pessimism about women and men ever getting on together.

This is not the position of Goshu. I have suggested already his straightforward attitude towards divorce. But on a somewhat deeper level, there seems to be an acceptance in his work of a sort of basic complementarity between the sexes. Men and women are put on earth to know each other, to love each other. Sometimes the adventure comes off. At times, as in *Mother, Get Married*, it is the maturity and goodness of the woman which brings order and direction to the man's life (a simple and agreeable fisherman). At other times, as in the fable *Dispersing Clouds*, it is the steadfastness of the man—the man who has chosen well: a doctor and idealist—which brings direction to the chaotic soul of a spoiled and immature young woman.

One might pause on this latter film as

a representative instance of Goshu's achieved cinema: a 'minor' film in certain ways, but perfect and harmonious. It was shot on location, in the open air, under the clouds and the mountains. A party of girl students from Tokyo is off on a walking holiday. One of them, Masako, falls ill at the railway station on the first stage of the journey. Osen, a kindly servant of the local inn, takes her in and nurses her. Next, Minami, a young doctor, visits the inn and diagnoses the illness (a minor form of pneumonia); but the recovery is delayed by a certain odd waywardness of spirit. The girl is not so much ill as unhappy. Slowly it appears that she is suffering from a misguided obsession about the memory of her dead mother—an obsession which stands in the way of all other human relationships.

The film dramatises the chastening of this young woman's pride. At first indifferent to the doctor's kindness, she comes to respond to him with something more like interest when she realises that his attention lies elsewhere. His self-reserve at first irritates her, at last pitches her into love and desire. *Dispersing Clouds* captures the possibility of the awakening of happiness in an individual human soul, and the chances and fortunes such things wait upon. More than this: it shows us it happening on the face and features of the girl, who advances not merely into

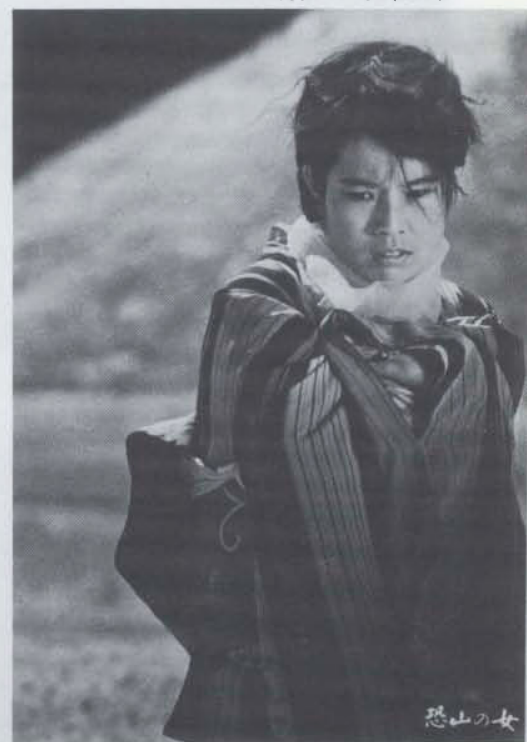
sexual but into moral selfhood, as it were in front of our eyes.

One wonders whether this is the sort of thing that the encyclopaedists will be thinking of when they next consider their entries on 'Goshu-ism'. Yes, in a way, all cinema, Goshu's included, is a 'slice-of-life'. The clouds disperse and gather again, and under them human beings search out their destinies. But there is perhaps a sociological, humanistic connotation to the expression that fails to do justice, in certain measure, to the intense private drama of Goshu's late cinema. His films are undeniably humane; but they are, also undeniably, I believe, and as I have tried to show, adult, and even erotic.

I am thinking here of certain startling moments of intimacy: the moment, for example, in *Dispersing Clouds* when Masako massages her father's feet by treading on them. Why should this be so sensual? It has the sweetness and directness of the best sort of naturalism. Or take the scene in *Twice on a Certain Night* when Akiko, drying her husband's hair, suddenly leans forward and flicks the wax out of his ear. No interpolation of shot is called for (indeed it would be positively wrong): the gesture happens in a moment and either one notices it or one doesn't. The kisses in Goshu's films, likewise, because rationed, are memorable: I recall the scene in *Elegy of the North* when the crippled young woman Reiko, following the architect home at night, throws herself at him as if she had never before held a man.

There is, in such gestures, passion and simplicity and directness. Or again, in *Innocent Witch*, even more violently, the line of spittle connecting the lovers' kisses, in the only moment of ecstasy the director allows. (Goshu fails, of course, in a film about brothels, to show the audience any nudity.) There are kisses that are shown, and kisses that are not

An Innocent Witch (1965).



shown, and somehow, both things are 'erotic'. The married woman Suzuko in *Rebellion of Japan*, alone in the park with the man she loves, closes her eyes and silently invites him to embrace her. No such luck. (He has taken a self-imposed military vow of chastity.) Later in the film, however, guiding her home in a snowstorm, he massages her toes against frostbite and, in a striking moment of decision, bends towards them and takes them in his mouth . . .

Where does this leave us exactly? Comparisons with other film-makers have been offered (and in view of the above it seems we might have to add Buñuel). Enough, anyway, to make it clear that the author of this article believes Gosho deserves to be considered among the masters. In the end, the spectre of Mizoguchi hovers over any such comparative judgments, as a sort of ultimate Japanese testing-place.

A film like *The Fireflies* (historical drama of the Tokugawa period) cedes nothing to Gosho's great contemporary either in the rigour of its form or in the encompassing humanity of its content. As far as the form is concerned; one would stress the way in which, in Gosho as in Mizoguchi, everything is imagined three-dimensionally. Whether constructing a scene by means of travelling or dolly shots, or (more characteristically) dividing it up into hundreds of separate little 'takes', the effect is always the same, to leave the viewer persuaded of the real physical integrity of the environment; the room exists, with four walls and a ceiling; and beyond it another room; and beyond that a courtyard, a street, an alley, a 'quarter',

the bustle of humanity itself. Profound realists, perfectionists of detail, both directors consider nothing too small to escape the compass of the 'dure et pénible recherche de la vérité.'

As for the content of their cinema, both directors, I believe, share the same deep and patient attitude towards history. *The Fireflies* is set in the Tokugawa period, at an only slightly earlier date than that of Mizoguchi's masterpiece, *My Love Has Been Burning* (1949). The politics of both films are progressive, but not crudely so, in their shared attitude of pity towards the victims of residual feudalism. In *The Fireflies*, Gosho conjures the encompassing danger with a sure hand: a stable

world (the world of Tose's inn) surrounded by hostile forces; the sense in which (a comparison, here, with *Ugetsu Monogatari*) the rule of the state is on the verge of turning into banditry. How one conducts oneself in these circumstances, how one keeps to one's standards and duties, is the deep subject shared by both film-makers. Here there is no attitudinising, nothing of that falsely assumed superiority to history which mars the work of so many of our own modern film-makers. Instead, only the patient realist question, what was it really like at the time, in its glory and bitterness? What were the opportunities for behaving well? What were the opportunities for heroism? ■



Dispersing Clouds (1951).



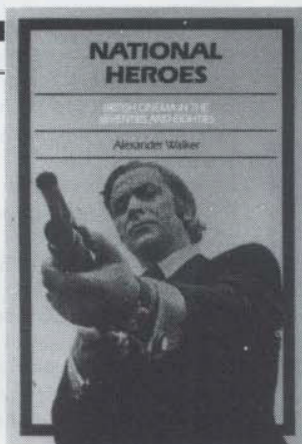
The Fireflies (1958).

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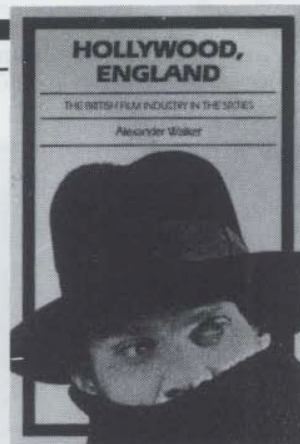
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Born in Flames

Arthur Penn's *Target*

Thirty years ago the nuclear fireball went off at the end of *Kiss Me Deadly*, with a solitary couple cowering in its glare on the beach. At the end of *Target* (Rank), the screen also erupts in flames—only here, huddled before the fire, the nuclear family is being reborn. Ex-CIA agent Gene Hackman, returning to Europe after eighteen years, settles some unfinished business, rescues his kidnapped wife Gayle Hunnicutt, and becomes a dad again to his disaffected son Matt Dillon. The difference in apocalypse might be a measure of the distance between the two films. *Kiss Me Deadly* was sarcastic about spies and atom secrets, and about a hero whose Cold War attitudes logically, if surreally, culminated in that big bang. Arthur Penn's film treats espionage as an absurdity from which it wants to reclaim

its hero, a spy who reluctantly joins the New Cold War, who doesn't save the world for democracy but does fight for a sort of status quo, a crumpled, fatherly Rambo. Hasn't Hackman, after all, been that route before, just ahead of Sylvester Stallone, in *Uncommon Valor*?

It is, surely, a strange revolution that has taken Penn from the position of

Richard Combs

counter-culture spokesman (say *Alice's Restaurant* and *Little Big Man*) to what looks, by default, like that of a Reagan apologist. Is it a revolution in him, a hardening of the arteries, a drifting away from the causes of twenty years ago? (Or even ten years ago, given that

Night Moves took a rather *Kiss Me Deadly* attitude towards its hero, another private eye and another Hackman role, whose blindness, egocentricity and anti-intellectualism were seen as much a symptom of the Watergate era as Mike Hammer's were of McCarthyism.) Or is it the world that has turned around Penn's films, demonstrating how impermanent and fragile, how open to mis- and reinterpretation, any political meaning or moral metaphor might be? Because the conflagration that ends *Target* has been common enough in Penn, along with the context of the family in trouble: from the incineration of Billy the Kid's adoptive home in *The Left-Handed Gun* to the Southern dynasty a-burning at the end of *The Chase* to the fireside groupings and smelting processes of *Four Friends*. Out of this, Penn's revolution suggested, self, family and society might be born again; it was not his fault that this then became the catch phrase of a new conservative revolution.

If changing times bring changed meanings, a change in the relationship of a film-maker to himself, his medium and the world, then it is also true that there are different revolutionary seasons for different revolutionaries. The 50s conservative climate against which Robert Aldrich was reacting in *Kiss Me Deadly* has come back full force in the 80s (to vindicate Arthur Schlesinger's theory of a thirty-year cycle in American political moods). And one might have expected *Target*—Penn being, other differences aside, a turbulent, combative film-maker like Aldrich—to have taken up a similar stance within that climate. That it doesn't, that it functions more like an unwilling fellow traveller to the New Conservatism, is revealing. Perhaps Aldrich was best at saying what he was against rather than what he was for; at fighting his way out of a tight situation towards a purely theoretical freedom (hence all those military films, where the struggle is for fraternal relationships in paternalistic situations). The reverse is true of Penn, who always tried to define and identify with positive changes in the *Zeitgeist*, to liberate his characters by opening them up to broader freedoms.

It follows that Aldrich should be at home in the stifling 50s, while Penn came into his own in the liberated 60s (when Aldrich could only make bland adventure films). As the 70s close in, Aldrich begins to come back into his own (*Ulzana's Raid*, *Twilight's Last Gleaming*), while Penn plays games (*The Missouri Breaks*) or mostly stays silent. One might say that *Target* is playing games: a cynical exercise by a director out to break the habit of too much silence (Penn: 'I was looking for a high-action film. I just wanted to get out there and use my skills, frankly. I've been testy about not working'). That those games take it into territory dearest to Penn—a divided country, split between fathers and sons, past and present, Europe and America, image and reality—makes it seem less cynical. It might be

Americans in Paris: Matt Dillon, Gene Hackman.



more like a survival strategy, the only way Penn can keep his most personal game going in an uncongenial time, when his kind of political reform (it starts at home, in the family) has been swamped by the traditionalists' emphasis on home and hearth.

Little Big Man was his most expansive treatment of his theme—a nationwide, century-long epic of illusory identity, fallacious fathers and broken promises, all wrapped up in a history that might be a gigantic lie. And it rolled with all that late 60s scorn for the Establishment, for majority culture, with sympathy at last for the Indian and identification with ethnic minorities. *Target* then becomes his most introverted treatment—wittily, at times brilliantly executed, produced out of a kind of silence, exile and cunning. Where once Penn pounced on a genre like the Western, assuming a general interest in seeing the old conventions overturned, he has to proceed more cautiously now that supercharged genres are in fashion. *Target* doesn't pounce on the espionage thriller, but it does run through a strange glissando of moods, bewildering and exhilarating, from the straight to the tongue-in-cheek to the absurd. It proves there has been no falling off in certain skills: there's a car chase that is shot and edited with splendid muscularity, while at the same time sending itself up with none of the archness that the Bond films have made common. If Penn can no longer work against a given set of conventions, he can at least treat them as contingent. The hero of *Little Big Man* saw his life as a series of 'periods', in each of which he was someone different, and each of which ended in failure or disappointment; *Target*, like *The Missouri Breaks*, has turned this theme into a guessing-game quality of style.

It evidently affects the plot, in which young Chris Lloyd (Dillon) discovers, while they are scouring Europe for his kidnapped mother, that the father he assumed was just a boring, middle-aged stick-in-the-mud once worked for the CIA, and when needs be can still perform like a hero. It's a juvenile fantasy (Dillon's presence is part of the new super-genre packaging, like Brando and Nicholson in *The Missouri Breaks*) which has been made to work like comedy. (Penn has said that all that was retained of the original story by Leonard Stern—of *Get Smart* spy-spoof fame—was the father-son relationship; writers Howard Berk and Don Petersen were brought in to deliver a different kind of comic relief.) Now images are shattered to reveal other images—mirrors are a minor motif in the film—and the resentments and disappointments of the parent-child relationship are given a heightened play, become a surreal bargaining for self, meaning and worth. There's an exaggeration, verging on both hysteria and mockery, in the way Penn shoots the shouting matches between Lloyd père and fils, the latter maddened by the new revelations about his father as they chase round Paris after the kidnappers. The end point is

Chris' discovery that not only has his father lived under an alias, since resigning from the CIA and retiring to the lumber business in Texas, but that so, unknowingly, has he. Learning his real name for the first time, he feels only frustration: it seems as dull, unappealing and meaningless as the one he has always used.

Actually, there is a point beyond this end point, a retreat into areas of nightmare reversal, which more or less keeps pace with the passage of the pair deeper into Europe. It's not so much Chris' recognition that his father is Superman who has been living for the past eighteen years as Clark Kent, but that this other existence renders his own sense of self, his very identity, somewhat contingent. From Paris they travel to Hamburg, where Walter Lloyd (Hackman) makes contact with a woman, Lise (Victoria Fyodorova), whom he once knew in the espionage business, and they sit up at night ruminating about the life they might have had together. (Lise feels that she has 'acted' her life rather than lived it; Lloyd talks about her having written him out of her script.) Chris overhears this discussion, and so becomes witness in a way to a primal scene, but one that has to do with not his creation but his unmaking, because if his father had married Lise it would have changed the script of his own life.

The pay-off to this comes when they eventually find Chris' mother, Donna (Hunnicut), after Lloyd has travelled into Eastern Europe for a confrontation with his old opposite number. Their rescue turns into more of a 'reconstruction' of the lost mother. In a disused Luftwaffe hangar, now used as a place

for exchanging agents between East and West, Donna is found tied and intricately wired with explosives, from which she has to be painstakingly unplugged. Penn begins the scene with an extraordinary high shot, making Donna seem a tiny, doll-like figure, an imprisoned creature in one of the malevolent deconstruction and creation fantasies of Eastern European animators like Lenica or Borowczyk.

Family, it turns out, has been all. Donna was kidnapped while on holiday in Paris (Europe having become a minefield for even lighthearted excursions by Americans) by Lloyd's former adversary, Schroeder (Herbert Berghof). He wanted to lure Lloyd to East Berlin to settle an old score, the massacre of his own family in the last counter-espionage operation Lloyd had supervised before his retirement. But someone else has also been after Lloyd, just as intent on his *not* reaching Schroeder: the man actually responsible for the massacre, a double agent working for the CIA who had committed the murders to prevent his cover being blown. He turns out to be an old colleague of Lloyd's, a fatherly sort, who welcomes him back to Paris, promises to help recover Donna, and becomes upset when Lloyd slips away from a tail: 'We've got a member of the family lost out there.'

The description of international espionage as a family business is both cynical and quite germane as a thematic ploy of Penn's: the rhyming of one game of illusion and disguise with the dissembling, the loss and discovery of self, in another. With a dash of genre cynicism, *Target* plays out a double mystery, one in public triggering off one

Reconstructing mother: Matt Dillon, Gayle Hunnicutt.





Gene Hackman in a game of illusion and disguise.

in private, perhaps more successfully than *Night Moves*. It also pairs the routine disillusionment of the espionage movie (Lise's part-wistful recollection of 'a time of betrayal, murder, hidden violence') with a more authentic sense of loss and drift, the way again that Penn sees change always in terms of family drama—the move perhaps from a smaller

family to a larger. The scene where Lloyd explains to his son how he became involved in the CIA in the first place describes one such move: working his way aimlessly through Europe as a youngster, he happened to find himself talking to someone who happened to be an agent, and who picked up on something in his manner that made him

seem eminently recruitable to the 'family'.

Not really linked to anything in the espionage movie are two scenes that follow a more direct line from earlier Penn, and that take place in non-urban settings, a rural 'alternative' that (as in *Alice's Restaurant*) is no panacea. The first takes place just after Donna has left for Paris, when Lloyd, in an effort to re-establish contact with his son, takes him on a fishing trip. This leads to a desultory conversation on a lake, in which Lloyd's enquiries about college, and Chris' uninspiring career plans (stock-car racing), prompt a final exchange about the state of the environment and the world: 'Your generation did screw it up.' 'Don't worry about it—yours will too.' The second takes place in Schroeder's own garden, where death has definitely come to stay: in this tranquil but mournfully overcast setting, he sardonically introduces Lloyd to three tombstones as if they were the still living members of his family. Suddenly one realises that the combativeness in Penn always contained its undertow of bitterness, nostalgia and regret, and why in the 80s this reformist could seem such a traditionalist. He may be the only contemporary director in the American cinema who comes close to being an heir to John Ford, who projects all social change through the epic struggle of families, and sees as much glory (or necessity) in celebrating loss as achievement. ■

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Captive: Irina Brook, Hiro Arai.

Hiro and heroine

Captive/Alan Stanbrook

'I'm not going to let myself die for the sake of an aria,' says Rowena Le Vay, the central figure in director Paul Mayersberg's maiden movie, *Captive* (Virgin). 'I'm not a heroine in some opera.' No? If not, then what? The hero, perhaps? The idea is less fanciful than it sounds. In the course of the film, her role shifts from playing Tosca to her father's Scarpia to acting as the unwitting object of affection of a lovesick, suicidal Japanese. Pinkerton to his Butterfly? For those with ears to hear, *Un bel di* echoes throughout.

It will be interesting to see what a modern audience makes of *Captive*. Despite contemporary overtones, drawing obliquely on the Patty Hearst saga, the plot (about the abduction of a spoilt heiress and the torture that induces her to side with her captors) is a red herring. No political motives and attitudes are analysed or even addressed. Instead, the story is used as a pretext—first, and perhaps superficially, to examine the techniques of modern brainwashing: the use of isolation, sensory deprivation and psychological pressures to persuade a victim to doubt the undoubted. After which, it seems, it is only a short step to accepting the converse. Mayersberg contrasts the unpleasant and unacceptable means with what can sometimes be beneficial ends. In Rowena's case it liberates her personality.

Behind the detail of the action, however, Mayersberg also uses the plot as a melodramatic framework in the literal sense. This is a drama with song—the kind of thing Visconti was aiming for in *Senso*, except that he used Bruckner instead of the Puccini for which the

climax in the Castel Sant'Angelo cried out. Mayersberg has the courage Visconti on that occasion lacked and punctuates his 'libretto' with liberal musical as well as dramatic quotations from *Tosca* and *Madama Butterfly*—sometimes mischievously parodied and distorted in Michael Berkeley's witty score.

The birthday dinner to which Rowena's father entertains her recalls Scarpia's single-minded pursuit of Floria Tosca round the table of his private chambers. Later, when he sets fire to his yacht at the behest of his daughter's kidnappers, it is to the accompaniment of the great first-act finale, 'Va, Tosca. Nel tuo cuor s'annida Scarpia.' When he phones Rowena to advise her to ditch her lover because he 'does not like his smell', the imperative tone is undercut by the flutterings of Cio-Cio-San on the soundtrack.

Are these allusions relevant? Yes, at the story level, since Rowena is the daughter of a famous diva who died bearing her, but also in terms of the themes which, like opera itself, work on an emotive plane in performing the alchemist's trick of turning base metal into gold.

Imprisoned figuratively by her father, a rich industrialist played with a saturnine scowl and a great swirl of purgatorial cigar smoke by Oliver Reed, then literally by her terrorist captors and lastly by the police, Rowena discovers new ways of relating to her past and to society. She rejects her father's materialistic world, hurling wine and then flour at one of his most valuable possessions (a painting so similar to Goya's *The Shootings of May 3rd* that perhaps the Prado

should look to its attributions). And she forms new attachments, sexual and social, to two of her captors, the French couple known simply as D and Bryony. What she fails to comprehend or recognise is the unspoken love of her third captor, the Japanese Hiro, grandson of a wartime kamikaze pilot.

Mayersberg and his production designer, Voytek, express this bond through a spreading network of oriental references. Rowena's house, outwardly like a fairy-tale castle and inwardly like a chapel, is transformed in the latter stages into a spare Japanese interior, with bedding on the floor; Rowena keeps the kimono Hiro gives her, whereas the peacock dress that is her father's birthday present she consigns to the flames directly he has gone. At the end, when Hiro prefers death to disappointment, he confronts her like a Mishima bound for the sword.

This kaleidoscopic approach, the sense in which myriads of facets glint at one another and form a pattern, comes as no surprise from the man who wrote the rich, resonant screenplays for two of Nicolas Roeg's most complex works, *The Man Who Fell to Earth* and *Eureka*. Indeed, the connections are even closer. It was on Roeg's recommendation that Mayersberg hired Mike Southon as director of photography. The look of the film—the dramatic chiaroscuro, the spectacular use of spotlight and deep focus, the low-slung cameras (sometimes almost as low as Ozu) and the imposing tracking shots as Rowena wends her way out of the abandoned warehouse that has served as her prison—lend Mayersberg's picture much of the visual excitement to be found in Roeg's own work.

That's a fine model to begin with, but by his next picture one will be looking for evidence of greater skill in directing actors. In retrospect, the triumph of *Performance*, on which Roeg cut his directorial teeth with Donald Cammell, lay precisely in the performances. In a former cameraman's first film, it was not what might have been expected.

What detracts a little from the achievement of Mayersberg's film is the uncertain playing of all but the experienced Oliver Reed. Irina Brook, Peter Brook's daughter, on whose shoulders the persuasiveness of the plot rests, is not always up to the challenge. There are times when Mayersberg's intentions have to be read through the music, the production design, the photography—indeed, anything but his leading lady's performance. Irina Brook at this stage in her career seems somewhat overparted, while the terrorists, played by French and Japanese actors, have evident difficulty in speaking their lines. None of this wrecks a more than promising first feature, but it confirms that 'being good with actors' is a talent that even a film buff as knowledgeable and cinematically literate as Paul Mayersberg cannot easily do without. □



After Hours: Griffin Dunne and John Heard.

Where angels fear to tread

After Hours/Richard Combs

There have been signs recently of something of a religious transformation in Martin Scorsese's work. Not a conversion, exactly; more a change of temper. It may be that some component of his ethnic temper has gone, the Italian Catholic connection (which was still very evident in the WASP Middle America of *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore* or the *echt* movie fantasy of *New York, New York*). It may be that his theology—and his sense of life in Manhattan—has shifted from its first scorching premise (go straight to hell, do not pass go, do not receive redemption) to include some cooler, more indeterminate state: instead of burning in hell, the protagonists of his two most recent films look as if they are stalled in purgatory. Or it may be the influence of his sometime screenwriter Paul Schrader: since their last collaboration, on *Raging Bull*, the Catholic Scorsese seems to have partly become the Calvinist Schrader, with despairingly comic storylines locked in predestined patterns. Or it may be that the collapse of his plans to film Nikos Kazantzakis' *The Last Temptation* has put Scorsese's own religious project into limbo, artistic purgatory.

Certainly, both *The King of Comedy* and *After Hours* (Columbia-EMI-Warner) might be described as comedies of frustration. If all Scorsese's heroes are driven and obsessive, overreachers hellbent for success in the Mafia, show-business or life, they've never seemed less likely to make it than in these two films. Or rather, success has begun to look just as limiting and defeating as failure: Rupert Pupkin, would-be 'personality' in *The King of Comedy*, is so sealed in self-

delusion that one can't even tell how real or imaginary the film intends his final success to be. Once the lyricist of big-city alienation and paranoia, and of his characters' desperate leaps of faith to transcend them, Scorsese has become the threnodist of frustration. One notices how muted (often literally, in terms of the sound level) his films have become, how much like circles in a void his characteristic camera movements seem.

In one way, this makes them the most brilliant, original comedies since middle-to-late Billy Wilder (say, *Kiss Me, Stupid* and *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*), mainly because they seem too despairing even to be comedies. In another, their strangely frozen, suspended subjects make them susceptible to being read, by default, as social satires. *The King of Comedy* was widely taken to be a critique, à la *Day of the Locust*, of show-business success, of the psychotic envy the not-famous are made to feel for those who are. And *After Hours* could be taken as a satire on a New York demi-monde, on the freakishness, pretension and tribal hostility an uptown boy encounters when he travels one night to the loft-divided reaches of SoHo in search of sexual adventure. The mood here is ostensibly lighter, more pixillated. The camera that scuds at boot level through the streets of neon and drifting steam intimates magic rather than the menace of *Taxi Driver*, which is confirmed by the waiter who glosses the meaning of the film's title: 'Different rules apply when it gets to be this late.' But magic can be mean, too: when things begin to go wrong, the hero's money acquires a life of its own, and subway

fares rise at midnight, it can turn into a nightmare of frustrated flight.

On the surface, the hero, Paul Hackett (Griffin Dunne), a self-effacing word processor operator by day, is the kind of hopeful innocent one might expect if this were a Neil Simon comedy about the rigors of urban life (think of *The Out-of-Towners*). The way Scorsese shoots Paul's early scenes, however—his mind drifting away amid the high-tech hum of the office; his hesitant movements at home, as if the prowling camera had caught him invading his own living space—suggests someone several degrees more dislocated, as remote from himself as the Jerry Lewis character in *The King of Comedy*. Paul is actually a modest mix of that film's two lead characters—more modestly alienated than Lewis' Jerry Langford, more modestly ambitious than De Niro's Rupert Pupkin. It's the latter that gets him into SoHo: reading *The Tropic of Cancer* in a diner one night, he attracts the interest of a girl, Marcy (Rosanna Arquette), who invites him to the loft where she is staying with her sculptress friend, Kiki (Linda Fiorentino). The assignation turns out weirder than he expects, and by the end he's fleeing the attentions of a vigilante mob, two art thieves and various women. He's finally landed by luck (or predestination) back outside his office, where he returns to the reassuring hum.

With perfect, impossible, dreamlike logic, everything that happens to Paul this night originates with himself, asserts an independent existence from him, then returns to haunt him. The twenty-dollar bill blown from his hand during his demonic taxi ride downtown turns up on Kiki's *papier-mâché* sculpture of a pensive/distressed Rodin-like figure; when Paul later reclaims the money, it leads him into further trouble. The scantily clad Kiki seems to promise an erotic sidetrack from the temporarily absent Marcy, except that she falls asleep while Paul is telling a story about how he was put in the burn ward when he had his tonsils out as a child, and had to be blindfolded from the horrors around him. He subsequently finds an illustrated book of such horrors, and glimpses a similar wound on Marcy, only to have it later turn into something else, a little top-hatted death's head tattoo, which he 'picks up', as an association, from a key ring.

Keys, like money, drift magically through this supercharged atmosphere, teasing talismans. What really proves Paul's undoing, however, are other people's expectations which, innocently, he excites. The plot of *The King of Comedy* is neatly resumed in the episode of Paul's encounter with a waitress (Teri Garr), who leaves a message ('Help. I hate this job') on the back of his bill, takes him to her apartment and makes him a gift of a sculpted cream-cheese bagel paperweight (perhaps something of Kiki's), then repays

his 'desertion' by plastering the neighbourhood with notices accusing him of being a burglar. She's a fair artist herself, having sketched his likeness for this wanted poster. Which suggests a view of art as the final presumption/projection on to someone else, and the final alienation of oneself. Paul only escapes the vigilantes when another obliging sculptress, June (Verna Bloom), covers him with *papier-mâché*. He is then mistaken for the 'real' thing by two thieves (Cheech and Chong) and stolen—only his eyes visibly 'alive' in their sockets, an image shockingly fit for Poe, or the Corman who made the art as murder joke in *A Bucket of Blood*.

It's the genuine horror of that premature burial which suggests why *After Hours* is not just social satire (it could be to the current art scene what *A Bucket of Blood* was to the Beats of the 50s), and more like a trip to the void. That's an area between life and death that might be called art, or cinema: it's at a 'conceptual art' party, after all, that Paul

meets June, who will immortalise him in *papier-mâché*, when his ambitions have sunk to their most modest, or risen to their most grandiose: 'I just want to live'. It follows that *After Hours* throughout works best as a comedy when it is closest to this and other terrors: a wonderful first half, when events in Kiki's loft, far from being just bohemian comedy, suggest that something quite nasty could happen at any moment. Pixillated horror is not an easy note to sustain, as the film occasionally demonstrates when it slips into something else: a Bogdanovich screwball comedy when Paul teams up with a girl in a Mr Softee ice-cream van, or something Neil Simonish when he sinks to his knees in the street, looking up: 'What do you want from me? What have I done? I'm just a word processor, for Christ's sake.' As the only moment in the film, though, which indicates that the deity is watching over this turf, it suggests the state of suspension, the limbo, in which Scorsese himself is now working. □

envies Mona her freedom; the garage mechanic; the fellow roadie who wears a padlock round his neck symbolising, no doubt, how the soul is imprisoned in the body; the dope-smoking squatters at Nimes railway station who terrorise photomat users into paying extra for their photos, and the drop-out philosophy graduates who have turned to goat rearing and ecological cheese-making. Face to camera or voiceover, they all have their word to say about Mona. Many are non-professional actors, witnesses whose authenticity is reinforced by their thick southern accents. This is the 1980s and this is society.

But Varda treats them with a cold, dispassionate eye. One only has to imagine how this motley crew would have been used in a British film as a spontaneous enactment of social prejudice, to understand that Varda is after neither realism nor comedy. For Mona all these are chance encounters—or at least encounters dictated by basic needs for food, drink and shelter—and she drives a straight path through the web of near but not quite farcical social relationships. The common characters are saved from risibility because they are used to throw Mona's tragedy into sharper relief. There is something elemental about Mona. Like Aphrodite she rises naked from the sea in the opening sequence and returns like Proserpine to the earth in winter, driven to her death by the extreme cold. It is an entirely natural cycle. Her needs and desires are similarly minimal; food, shelter, sex occasionally, the odd roll-up, a franc earned here or there, her belongings on her back. She gets by, but when offered a patch of land to till, she has neither the will nor the inclination to invest beyond the immediate. She is somehow pre-rational.

It is an extraordinary performance by Sandrine Bonnaire, who in her physically repulsive appearance is obliged to deny

Cold Venus

Vagabonde/Jill Forbes

Notwithstanding its tricky British title, *Vagabonde* (Artificial Eye) is the simple tale of the vagrant Mona as she is remembered by the men and women encountered on her perilous route through the vineyards and villages near Arles. She is portrayed as an odd and lonely figure whose behaviour, though strictly incomprehensible to all except her fellow down-and-outs, nevertheless arouses an astonishing degree of sympathy and affection. Even if her life's achievement is perhaps nothing more tangible than the determination to pursue an idea to its logical conclusion, her inevitable death is still perceived as a cruel curtailment, and it is the combination of narrative simplicity, visual lyricism and Mona's personification of an uncompromising, single-minded and ultimately irrational attitude, which lends *Vagabonde* its poetry and meta-physical power.

It is an unusual departure for Agnès Varda, a stark and spare film which turns on a number of judiciously contrived juxtapositions instead of being defeated by them. What transformed *Lion's Love* into a museum piece and rendered *Le Bonheur* and *One Sings, the Other Doesn't* merely embarrassing, was an irritating combination of the genuinely radical and the merely modish, what *Cahiers du Cinéma* called a surprising ability to 'like both Mao and antique dealers', together with an uncertainty in handling emotion. But in *Vagabonde* Mona's pilgrimage, her existential quest, contrast with the trivial pursuits of a Shakespearean gallery of minor characters.

The picaresque mode yields a bizarre set of individuals. Macha Méril is the university professor specialising in tree diseases who, for a time, takes Mona under her wing, feeds her, allows her to sleep in her car. She has a male student with a rapacious wife; he has a senile aunt from whom he will inherit; the aunt has a maid, who, briefly, puts Mona up; and the maid has a good for nothing boyfriend... There is also the small-holder who allows Mona to stay with his Moroccan labourer until the fellow immigrants return and throw her out. There is the peasant's daughter who

Vagabonde: Yahiaoui Assouna and Sandrine Bonnaire.



everything that a member of her profession lives by. *Vagabonde* is perhaps a deliberate inversion of Pialat's *A Nos Amours*, Bonnaire's first film, in which she sailed out to sea as the living figurehead of a ship; proud, vivacious and beautiful. Here she returns from the sea to squalor. The performance is also the product of Varda's technique of composing the film the night before shooting, explaining nothing to Bonnaire, and refusing to let rational explanation penetrate her character. The only lapse into narrativisation is when Mona tells the philosopher goatherds that she is fed up with being a secretary and with sexist office managers, and it is interesting that the philosopher and his wife are the only characters who closely resemble the social types of Varda's earlier films.

Vagabonde is of course a political film—radical because it is a road movie with a female protagonist; pessimistic because, in contrast to Tanner's *Messidor* which it resembles in structure and ambition, it is a cold film. This is the frozen winter of 1984-5; the world is dying, the plane trees are infected with a fatal disease, the vines on the bare terraces are being clipped. It is also tempting to see it as Varda's farewell to the insouciance of the *nouvelle vague*. Her shooting diary recalls that Roger Leenhardt, spiritual father of the New Wave, made *Les Dernières Vacances* about a mile from where *Vagabonde* was filmed. The Leenhardt title was prophetic indeed, and what was once a lovers' playground has been turned into a dying landscape with figures isolated by their private pursuits. □

drivers, chisel and fretsaw, reminding her that he needs three cups of strong coffee before he can bring himself to talk to her civilly in the morning. Léone scolds her for fidgeting, vanity, weirdness, bad language, sullen looks. Lulu goes off home in a huff because Charlotte says she smells. Charlotte doesn't know what she's turning into, but she knows it had better be an improvement.

It could all be the small change of a clumsy sitcom. But the stereotypes turn sweetly into real people. Dad wearily moves over to make way for his insomniac long-legged baby. 'Is something the matter? You can talk to Léone if it's something female, Charlie.' 'J'ai des ennuis, c'est tout,' she replies. Then, after a moment, 'Tu ne trouves pas que la vie est brusque?' He is as taken aback as we are by the word. But he is as tenderly aware of her hurt as he is incapable of dealing with it or explaining it to her. So also the brother's little kiss on her sleeping cheek as he sets off without her for the holiday; or the stern lectures read her by the no-nonsense Lulu; or the brimming affection that the mothering outsider, Léone, mostly holds in check: these constant touches restore us to a world of adults as swept by contradictions as she is herself, or a world of even smaller children who ape what they imagine are the certainties of the grown-ups. 'Oh what a disgusting town this is,' she tells Lulu one minute. And 'Don't you love the old streets and the lake and everything?' she enthuses the next. Lulu gives her an old-fashioned look: 'It faut choisir dans la vie, Charlotte.' Lulu is quite clear, from the commanding heights of her eight years, how things ought to be sorted out. She knows how to deal with a repellent, snivelling would-be suitor from school, seeking Charlotte's 'company'. She hits him with her handbag.

Trouble, for the film, arrives with Clara. Charlotte resourcefully befriends a much older local lad, Jean, a metal-worker, delivering a piano stool to the fairytale lakeside palace rented by the Clara entourage. For some reason that escapes us, she is quickly accepted here and steps willingly into the dream, welcomed by an outrageously over-the-top manager, Sam (Jean-Claude Brialy). He seems to think he's playing a Chabrol grotesque, and good fun it is too, but it belongs to a different film. Less good fun is the rest of the entourage, who are also in a different film, but are not sure whose. Before long Charlotte is borrowing Clara's flame-coloured concert frock, and joining the floodlit party by the lake as Clara, smiling beatifically as ever at her guests, tosses off a little nocturne at the Bechstein on the lawn.

Happily, reality obtrudes soon. Jean, mistaking the girl's age and motives, makes a clumsy attempt on her virtue in a beautifully written and paced scene at the café-hotel. 'You can see the line of her panties through her trousers,' Jean can-nily observes of the slatternly waitress.



L'Effrontée: Charlotte Gainsbourg, Bernadette Lafont, Julie Glenn.

La vie est brusque

L'Effrontée/Gavin Millar

Claude Miller was assistant in his time to Bresson, Demy, Godard and Truffaut. The lessons learnt from Demy and Truffaut might be more easily guessed at in this gentle and fanciful comedy, titled in English *An Impudent Girl* (Artificial Eye), rather than anything gleaned from the two sterner masters. *L'Effrontée* is a 13-year-old, Charlotte (Charlotte Gainsbourg, daughter of Serge and Jane Birkin), who lives with her father and older brother in a small house in the poor industrial quarter of somewhere that also has a millionaire residential quarter on a lake. Mother died in childbirth. Dad is a harassed jig-and-tool maker with a sad eye for non-resident housekeeper Léone (Bernadette Lafont). Charlotte, out of patience with her schoolmates, has for company only the devotedly worship-

ping eight-year-old Lulu. To the town comes a dream, a 13-year-old piano-playing prodigy, Clara. Charlotte determines not only to go to her concert, but to offer this vision of beauty, genius and sophistication her lifelong allegiance.

The script of this trickily simple tale, by Luc Béraud and Bernard Stora as well as Miller and his wife Annie, is at its best when it is watching the girl cope with the real world rather than the dream one. (There are echoes of *The Member of the Wedding*.) Scene after scene of quiet incident, at school, in the yard, at the café, round the kitchen table, hits the note tellingly: accurate, funny, affectionate. Big brother wants to know what's happened to his tennis racquet, invading her sanctum to look for it. Dad wants to know what's happened to his best screw-

'Yes,' counters Charlotte judiciously, 'but it looks ok on her—though it types her.' Unhappily, inevitably, the two worlds are bound to collide. Comes the day of the concert. As Charlotte sits breathless with love at the vision on stage, Lulu's hurt bursts its bounds. She stands up and starts shouting at the pianist invading her happiness. Not for the first time Miller loses us. Only after some silly business with Sam does the otherwise discriminating tact begin to operate again, in a touchingly managed finale between the two pals.

Perhaps Miller and his team's temptation was to take Charlotte's dream-vision as a cue to cast the veil of caricature over how they saw it too; to pretend that her view of Clara and Sam, their hangers-on, their travels, their champagne, their speedboats, their swimming pools, was the real one. In doing so, they threw away that tender distance which makes the closely observed reality—even when it's at its most fanciful—so affecting. Charlotte scrapes her knee at school. 'It's not serious,' she tells Lulu solemnly, 'but the nurse said my blood was a particularly nice red.' There's the Miller that Demy and Truffaut would be proud of. The best of *L'Effrontée* matches their best, and is a march ahead of either of Miller's other two features seen here, *The Best Way to Walk* and *This Sweet Sickness*. □

Soho & Napoli

Absolute Beginners

Sean French

One of the most, indeed one of the only, attractive aspects of Julien Temple's film of *Absolute Beginners* (Palace) is how little it has to do either with Colin MacInnes' novel or with 1958, the year in which it is set. An attempt at 'authentic' adaptation might well have ended up something like *Sapphire*, Basil Dearden's strange and fascinating 1959 thriller about the murder of a West Indian girl in London. This is an important, flawed film of two jarring halves: the police seem to have been left over from a drab thriller of the austerity years while the stubbornly unassimilated black milieu seems to anticipate the Dionysiac 1960s. A recreation of this world in black and white with a moody Miles Davis score might have been intriguing. But, as most of what makes up MacInnes' London is clearly borrowed, exaggerated or imagined, it would have been irrelevant.

The actual film is less an adaptation than an immense collage into which Temple and his team have crammed anything that caught their eye. The plot, in which young photographer Colin Young (MacInnes' hero was never named) is first separated from and then reunited with his girlfriend Crêpe Suzette, is



Mandy Rice-Davies in
Absolute Beginners.

virtually dispensed with in favour of a series of set-pieces: in the film's opening sequence Colin prowls round Soho snapping its exotic inhabitants; Suzette achieves fame as a model by leaping on to the catwalk at a high society show and displaying a hastily improvised costume; Colin's father (Ray Davies of The Kinks) sings amid domestic mayhem about his desire for a quiet life; the sinister entrepreneur, Vendice Partners (David Bowie), inspires Colin to cruel ambition; and in the film's final scene, race riots explode in the Notting Hill area that MacInnes rechristened Napoli.

The style is deliberately eclectic and fragmented, ranging from the knock-about music-hall antics of Colin's family to the stylised violence on the streets of Napoli. For the elaborate musical sequences, Julien Temple and his choreographer, David Toguri, borrow freely from Hollywood originals. For David Bowie's 'That's Motivation' it's a single shot from Gene Kelly's 'Broadway Ballet' in *Singin' in the Rain*; the opening sequence echoes the famous street-scene choreography of *Guys and Dolls* (which Toguri also made use of for the National Theatre's production of that musical) and the Napoli rioters prance and stab in the shadow of Jerome Robbins' *Jets* and *Sharks* from *West Side Story*.

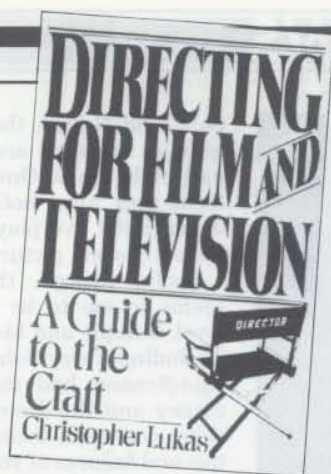
The film has been cast with young unknowns in the leads, one star actor (James Fox), some rock stars from Julien Temple's pop promo days and a clutch of old celebrities like Lionel Blair and Mandy Rice-Davies. The music is arranged by the veteran jazzman Gil Evans, but produced by the celebrated modern producers (of albums by Elvis Costello and Madness) Clive Langer and Alan Winstanley, the result being a mixture of pastiche and modern pop. There is an exhilarating boldness about Temple's plundering of ideas and styles and the result is occasionally impressive, as with the coarse splendour of John Beard's stylised studio re-creations of

Soho and Napoli, the lurid yellows and oranges splashed across the coffee bars and night clubs. One or two of the performances also, notably Lionel Blair's demonically overplayed pop impresario, have a garish, picture-postcard vitality.

Sadly, though, the film ultimately seems to me to be a failure on every level. Temple and his four screenwriters (including Terry Johnson, author of *Insignificance*) had the opportunity, the money and the desire to produce something radical; a feeling for the possibilities and failures of youth of the kind that George Lucas was able to explore in *American Graffiti*. In the event they've come up with little more than a lacklustre rehash of all those old Cliff Richard movies like *Expresso Bongo* and *The Young Ones*, with David Bowie and James Fox playing the parts that used to be taken by Laurence Harvey or Robert Morley. The political dimension added for the 1980s is a B-movie subplot about white landlords trying to drive blacks out of Notting Hill Gate and thus inadvertently provoking the notorious race riots. Major characters appear for a scene or so and then disappear, languishing, one suspects, on some distant cutting-room floor or in some earlier draft of the script.

Eddie O'Connell plays the hero, with some skill and conviction. Patsy Kensit, as Suzette, displays neither quality. Most of the other actors perform in a style of broad caricature that in every case proves impossible to sustain. It would be tempting simply to list the faults of the film—the infelicitous lines of dialogue, the clumsy mugging, the disjointed construction—but what's really wrong is something else. It's not just that Temple can't coordinate his large cast the way Lucas could in *American Graffiti*, or that he can't use his non-naturalistic design with the authority Coppola had in *One from the Heart*. It's a more basic inability to construct a sequence through editing, to move from dialogue to a song without making the audience think the scene has finished, and then, on a higher level, to control the shifts in tone and pace from scene to scene.

Absolute Beginners, though, is not that sort of a film. If Julien Temple has achieved anything radical, it is to dismember film into a collection of pop videos. Ray Davies, Patsy Kensit, David Bowie, Sade (as a nightclub singer) and Tenpole Tudor (as Ed the Ted) have one each. Any of them could have appeared later or earlier in the film or not at all without much perceptible difference. But even judged by the lower standards that obtain in the world of promotional videos, they are much like the rest of Temple's output: competent but never startling. This is possibly commercial good sense. In making use of the video form, Temple may well be giving his audience, particularly in America, the right product at the right time. □



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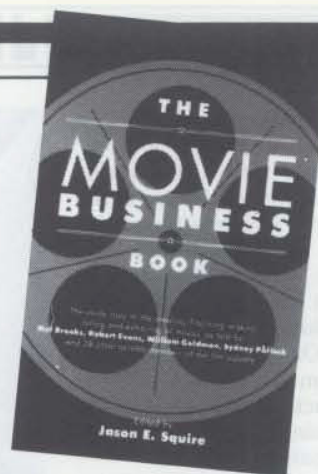
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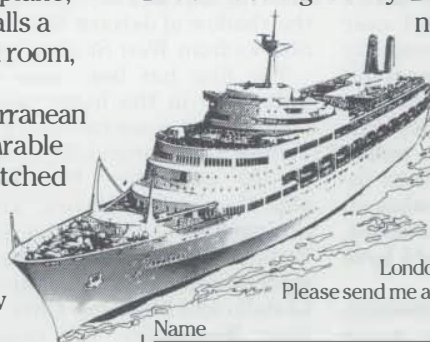
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A Russian patrimony

SCULPTING IN TIME
Reflections on the Cinema
by **Andrey Tarkovsky**
translated by
Kitty Hunter-Blair
Bodley Head/£14.95
(£7.95 paper)

The discussions on art and faith in Tarkovsky's films *Stalker* and *Nostalgia* have been called weak or banal by some English speaking critics who find his visual images redolent and haunting. Words, one might conclude, are not the director's strongest suit. But this collection of essays by the Russian film-maker who sought political asylum in the West in 1984 presents his ideas to such advantage that one begins to suspect that the philosophical dialogues in his films suffer by their brevity. True, in *Sculpting in Time* Tarkovsky repeats old, even ancient, theories about the spiritual and regenerative power of art. Yet, if I read him correctly, his desire is not to spin new formulae but to remind venal producers in the West, cautious Eastern-bloc film bureaucrats, and consumers of celluloid entertainment in both camps of what they have blocked or perhaps never learned about the poetic potentialities of the cinema. His stance makes one wonder whether critics who demand originality above all else aren't unwittingly hurting the artistic cinema they admire. Like a good preacher or teacher, Tarkovsky knows that other principles and values must be repeated, often and well.

In fact, the repetitiveness of *Sculpting in Time* creates its intensity. By his obsessive insistence on cinema's right to ambiguity and density, Tarkovsky demonstrates the strength of his belief and also suggests his constant irritation with his minority status. His opponents' points seem to ring in his ears although, like many a polemicist, he rarely adduces them. So this book reads like one half of a debate, and those unfamiliar with Soviet cultural history may not recognise the terms of the argument.

Tarkovsky's concern with ethics—to choose one example—is not a bland platitude but a principled response to the abortive nature of the post-Stalin liberalisation. Many younger members of the Soviet intelligentsia (Tarkovsky was born in 1932) were bitterly frustrated when the self-examination that began with the 1956 thaw was cut short. When historians, philosophers and mem-



Tarkovsky at the NFT.

oirists could not use state presses to ask if an end like communism could be created by coercive means like the purges, a few figures in the arts tried to fill the breach. By claiming the right to artistic ambiguity, they staked out needed manoeuvring space. 'Honesty', 'sincerity', 'conscience' and 'responsibility' became the watchwords of Tarkovsky and others who were sick of lies and cover-ups. (When the director writes 'truth is always beautiful' he is not just paraphrasing Keats.)

A number of intellectuals took protection in—and courage from—the role of nineteenth century Russian writers: to address 'cursed' questions and direct their countrymen to the good. Some embraced Dostoevsky, who had been viewed as reactionary, pessimistic and politically undesirable during the Stalin era and whose novel *The Brothers Karamazov* had been published rarely and in small editions. So when Tarkovsky cites Dmitri Karamazov's line 'Realism is a terrible thing,' he is implicitly attacking the still-enforceable Stalinist command that artists conform to the optimism and crude symbolism of socialist realism; when the film-maker writes, 'Dostoevsky had warned people of the "grand inquisitors" who presume to take upon themselves the responsibility for other people's happiness,' he is applauding the section of the novel most controversial in the USSR, even today.

Even in translation Tarkovsky must be translated. 'I am fascinated by the capacity of a human being to make a stand against the forces which drive his fellows into the rat race...' suggests, at least on one level: what made some of our parents into Stalinists and others into Mandelstam? This context would be evident to a literate Russian or, say, Slovak, but most of us in the West don't regard cataclysms in the Soviet bloc as major dates on our calendar. That history is seen as 'theirs', as very foreign indeed. It's partly our fault that this collection of essays needs a good preface. Partly, but not entirely, for Tarkovsky, even in emigration, still employs the shorthand

John Ford

The Man and His Work
TAG GALLAGHER

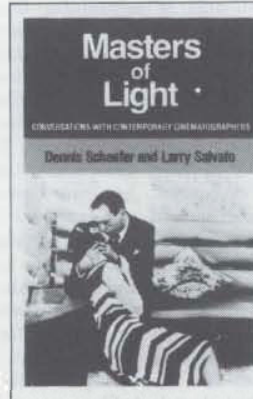
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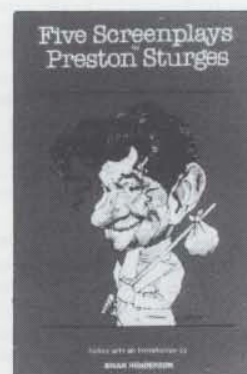
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of the tight-knit Russian intellectual milieu. Does he know yet how much *Mirror*, too, takes for granted?

An unfortunate example of Tarkovsky's failure to communicate is his interview in the March 1984 issue of the West Berlin magazine *Tip*. Xeroxed copies of a typewritten English translation by Zsuzsunna Pal have been scandalising film circles in the States because Tarkovsky makes such statements as, 'It seems to me that . . . woman's meaning, the meaning of female love, is self-sacrifice . . . or, 'Women don't thirst for knowledge as much as men. Fortunately.' According to Tarkovsky, men have become independent, cold and egotistical and have all but lost their spirituality; women who want equal rights are following suit. *Sculpting in Time* makes it clear, at least, that the director would like all of us—men and women, and artists in particular—to sacrifice selflessly in the name of love and to accept responsibility for others as a moral duty. He associates these values with the feminine probably because (as his essays show) he is steeped in Goethe, Pushkin, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. This is his patrimony and it provides the only alternative to the present which he can envision. And that's largely because so many -isms of the last half-century never made it past Soviet censors and therefore have had little or no impact in the USSR. If this book had an index (which it sorely lacks), one could easily note the absence of recent leading thinkers in psychology, sociology, history, literary and film criticism—and feminism.

As an émigré from another time, as well as another place, Tarkovsky is fascinating and often refreshing. He provides a needed link between cinema and the literary past—without making theatrical films. (In filming *Mirror* he moved so far away from theatrical conventions that he hid the plot from the actress who played his mother because he wanted her to live through—and express—each moment as his mother did, without knowing how everything would turn out.) *Sculpting in Time* confirms that Proust taught him much about the workings of memory, time and nostalgia and provided him with a lofty standard. In his attempt to prove that cinema has its own artistic possibilities equal to those of the best prose, this director has pushed himself hard. His comments on his own films are often critical. Perhaps familiarity with the nineteenth century literary masters provides an antidote to the egotism that Tarkovsky considers endemic to modern males.

KAREN ROSENBERG

Pictures on a page

JOHN BOORMAN
by Michel Ciment
translated by
Gilbert Adair
Faber/£25

Michel Ciment is the most Anglo-Saxon of modern French critics, in the sense that he has little patience with metaphysics. The 'grand interpretation' under the aegis of a Freud, a Marx or a Foucault is something that he tends to shy away from, without however—a difficult balancing act—becoming contemptuous of ideas. But his service to film (as exemplified in his previous excellent books on Kubrick, Losey and Rosi) is essentially that of a dossierist: he interviews the director and collaborators, compiles accurate and substantial filmographies, assembles a rich variety of visual materials. His books are savourous. You want to possess them not only for the information they contain, but also for how they handle and what they look like.

His latest book on John Boorman is no exception. There are interviews in depth and pertinent critical commentary. But above all there is a stupendous set of photographs. (Hence, alas, the price.) Not content with illustrating the points being patiently made in the text—though they certainly do that—these photographs, it seems, set up a dialogue of their own, truly an alternative form of criticism to the written variety. (I might add that one of the great things about *Positif*, the Parisian film magazine of which Ciment is editor, is the selection of its illustrations. These arrest you time and again by a sort of independent surrealist beauty.) At any event, the stills in the Boorman book are its primary *raison d'être*: a mixture of black and white and colour, the colour ones exceptionally well reproduced, against matte black backgrounds. As one turns the pages, the themes of Boorman emerge and cohere by themselves: a cluster of photographs involving fire; another involving water; another birth and sexuality; another again, horses and riders. Without requiring either text or interpretation, the *obsessiveness* of Boorman's dreaming establishes itself quasi-automatically.

Other photographs stand by themselves, effecting their own resonant transformations. Boorman's liking for forests is well known. ('Trees,' he has said, quoting Jung, 'are the thoughts of God.') On page 181 there is an

extraordinary black and white photograph from *Excalibur* of the death of Uther Pendragon. The actor's body is thrown forward against a bough, the mottled carapace of his armour melding, or camouflaging, into the branch's bark so that the body becomes in an instant that of a monstrous primeval armadillo. You blink and look again: the composition is as mysterious as a painting. Again and again these photographs, even out of context, strike you with their magic and passion.

Boorman's knowledge of painting is, of course, extensive and sophisticated. In several full-page spreads Ciment illustrates a film scene by placing it next to the painting it is derived from. Thus, a huge reproduction of Mantegna's *Crucifixion*, whose rocky sandstone background provides the motif of the Ethiopian scenes in *The Heretic*. Thus also, Millais' *Ophelia* (next to a watery girl from *Zardoz*), Rackham's *The Romance of King Arthur* (a scene from *Excalibur*), William Blake's *The Ghost of a Flea* (the locust magician Kukumo in *The Heretic*). Yet to read this book carefully is to wonder, at times, which way round one should be talking about the matter. Perhaps, in a sense, it is cinema itself which now provides (more beautifully than any other art form) those satisfactions of the represented human body which painting, earlier in the century, bartered away for a mess of abstractionism.

So much for the stills, in and out of context. Are they, in aggregate, more impressive than the movies themselves? Ciment can praise his director from his home base in France, safe in the knowledge that Boorman won't, after all, get much discriminating praise from a broad range of his countrymen (certain critics excepted). Against such conservatism, Ciment's act of faith is twofold: first, that Boorman (this English artist) is a genuine visionary; second, that his visionary cinema is underpinned by an essentially ethical sanity: or to put it another way, by an intelligible and consistent interpretation of life.

What this interpretation is, those who have seen his films recognise in some sort: a sense that Western man has lost direction; lost contact with his biological self; with natural religion; with vivifying myth. Boorman's films take the form of a 'quest', often among primitive peoples, to rediscover these mysteries. If the basic idea is simple, the variations and disguises are manifold; and Ciment, in the written sections, shows the astuteness of a genuine critic by being able to bring out the ways in which, throughout Boorman's films, the

Primitive both is, and isn't, Paradise.

Boorman, then, is something of a paragon. *Money into Light*, his journal of the making of *The Emerald Forest*, showed him to be not only a film-maker but also a graceful, witty writer. One is impressed by the generosity—the lack of affectation and egotism—of these conversations with Ciment. He expounds his ideas; expatiates, enthusiastically, on faraway places; praises or encourages his colleagues. He seems by nature optimistic, energetic and courteous. All his collaborators speak of him in the same terms, stressing his boyishness and tenacity. Reading these accounts of the making of the films is to see that Boorman possesses the one great natural gift of the film director, a sort of innate practicality, allowing him to find solutions to problems which, in the press of circumstance, seemed all but insoluble to his colleagues. Whether this isn't just another word for courage, I'm uncertain. Of course he is 'unique'. But by the same token, what *couldn't* the British film industry achieve with a few more men of his ilk?

MARK LE FANU

Radical visions

HOLLYWOOD FROM VIETNAM TO REAGAN

by Robin Wood

Columbia University Press/
\$25.00

From his auteurist studies of Hitchcock, Hawks and Bergman in the 60s to his skirmishes with *Screenthink* and embrace of gay activism in the 70s, Robin Wood has shared with the otherwise very different Noël Burch both the strengths and limitations of a born-again critic—periodically overhauling former attitudes without ever relinquishing a tendency to overstate his revised conclusions.

If *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* is as eccentrically contentious in its own way as Burch's *To a Distant Observer*, and as likely to stir up a flurry of debate, this is in part because of a maverick temperament which insists on holding fast to difficult positions. Unfortunately, however, Wood's latest collection cannot be said to contain even a fraction of the new scholarly material that gives Burch's study of Japanese cinema a value beyond the validity of its arguments. For better and for worse, Wood's book stands or falls on its polemics, and given some of the films that he has chosen to privilege,

BOOK REVIEWS

one wonders whether even some of his staunchest supporters will be prepared to follow him to the limit.

Arguing for bisexuality and against 'patriarchal capitalism', Wood takes on an assortment of Hollywood films of the last 15 years, with a 'flashback' reassessment of *The Chase* (1965) to demonstrate 'the breakdown of ideological confidence that characterises American culture throughout the Vietnam period and becomes a major defining factor in the late 60s and 70s.' Using this notion as a springboard, Wood proceeds through Altman, three exemplary 'incoherent texts' of the 70s (*Taxi Driver*, *Looking for Mr Goodbar*, *Cruising*), a good many horror films, Brian De Palma, the infantile fantasies of Lucas and Spielberg (juxtaposed with the more complex challenges of *Blade Runner*, another 'incoherent text'), four films directed by women (*Girl Friends*, *Tell Me a Riddle*, *Chilly Scenes of Winter* and *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*), and a category stretching 'from buddies to lovers' encompassing *Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*, *Dog Day Afternoon*, *Making Love* and *Victor/Victoria*. He winds up with two films each by Scorsese and Cimino (*Raging Bull*, *The King of Comedy*; *The Deer Hunter*, *Heaven's Gate*) which elicit 65 pages of analysis and Wood's most extravagant claims.

Describing himself as a 'free-lance radical', Wood disconcerts in part by adhering to films whose aesthetics are, at the very least, conservative. (This leaning is also evident in *CineAction*, the new Canadian film magazine which he co-edits.) At his provocative best while describing the ambivalent ideologies of 'incoherent texts' and late Scorsese (as well as the dubious uplift of Lucas and Spielberg), he tends to descend to a form of special pleading regarding the sexual politics of De Palma, Cimino and most exploitation horror films.

Any male critic who can rest his 'feminist' case on the four woman-directed features cited above is not apt to be very responsive to the more radical challenges of an Akerman, Borden, Ottinger, Potter, Rainer or Thornton, and Wood seems implausibly eager to hand out high marks to *Sisters* as 'the definitive feminist horror film' or *Eyes of a Stranger* (a violent rape and murder film) for the alleged subversion of showing its psychopathic murderer 'definitely dead, slumped ignominiously in the bathtub, his eyes closed, his glasses still perched incongruously on his nose—an unflattering reflection for any male in the audience who has relished

the sadistic assaults.' (Three cheers for not flattering the sadists.)

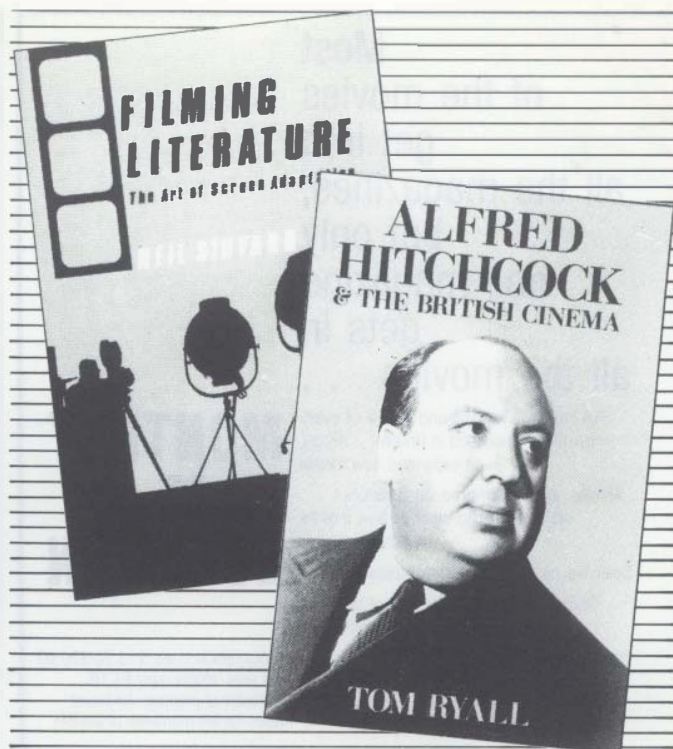
By contrast, Wood regards such Debra Winger films as *Urban Cowboy*, *An Officer and a Gentleman* and *Terms of Endearment* as so unspeakably vile for their middle-class values—despite their uncharacteristic (and, by Wood, unacknowledged) celebrations of female pleasure—that he can only mourn the decline of Western civilisation by evoking them: 'It is a profoundly depressing and alienating experience to sit in a packed auditorium watching these films with an audience who actually cheer their grossest moments.' (Presumably, audiences cheering the grossest moments in a Wood favourite like *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* are less culpable because they're celebrating the decline of family structures.)

Wood's increasing interest in the horror film has already yielded some valuable insights in *The American Nightmare*; but rather than develop these here, he has tended mainly to extend them *ad infinitum*, adding rather facile slogans along the way about 'patriarchal capitalism' and the like. For Wood, a good many things are too 'immediately obvious' to require any explanation, so that one is less than clear why 'bisexuality'—as opposed to, say, promiscuity in general—'represents the most obvious and direct affront to the principle of monogamy,' or why, in the same sentence, 'the homosexual impulse in both men and women'—rather than, say, either birth control or masturbation—'represents the most obvious threat to the norm of sexuality as reproductive and restricted by the ideal of family.'

Perhaps the problem here is Wood's difficulty in reconciling his recent political awakening with his earlier training. If part of him aspires to the radical visions of a Blake, perhaps an even more powerful part is still claimed by the very different sort of radicalism associated with F. R. Leavis, and it is not always a happy marriage.

Wood's Leavite puritanism finds characteristic expression in his worry over the possible pleasure a spectator might take from an Altman device: "Smart-ass" and "Cutie-pie" [attitudes] ... are a constant threat in *The Long Goodbye* ... but are just sufficiently "placed" by the pain and sense of confusion the film so impressively communicates.' But if for Wood 'real' pain and confusion are vastly preferable to the (apparently 'unreal') pleasure and clarity of formal play, it is also true that he can espouse modernism when it comes to Michael Cimino.

Significantly, although Wood



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BOOK REVIEWS

takes the present reviewer to task for asserting that in Altman's better films, 'artist and audience conspire to create the work in its living form,' he has little trouble arguing—in a chapter admittedly written almost a decade later—that in *Heaven's Gate*, 'we are given the sense of being allowed to participate imaginatively in its construction, to use our own judgment in making connections back and forth . . . In other words, the [film's] analysis is not offered to us as passive spectators; we are encouraged to construct it, as active participants.' Better late than never, one is tempted to say; yet it seems a pity that it takes a Cimino to inspire Wood to such flexibility.

JONATHAN ROSENBAUM

Cornering the market

**EXPORTING
ENTERTAINMENT
America in the World
Film Market, 1907-34**
by Kristin Thompson
BFI/£16

'We are getting a throttle-hold on the old world; it's all to the jazz and celluloid right now,' *Photoplay* declared in 1923, just when American film producers were making another determined stride forward in the race for domination of the world's film markets. But did the movies always mean Hollywood? We tend to take it for granted that American cinema has been the 'classical mode of production' since the movies were invented, but why did 'alternative cinemas' find it difficult to challenge Hollywood's hegemony in stylistic and economic terms?

Kristin Thompson shows that America's international leadership in marketing films was not achieved overnight. It is usually assumed that America had a head start in the scramble for foreign outlets because profits amassed from a vast home market enabled producers to contemplate exporting their entertainment. But the very size of America meant that at the beginning of the twentieth century companies concentrated their energies on selling films at home. In the meantime, France developed aggressive export strategies and a significant place in the American market. After 1908, however, the formation of the Motion Picture Patents Company enabled the American production sector to consolidate and restricted foreign competition by refusing licences to those who wished to gain a foothold in America.

Thus, on the eve of the First World War the American film industry girded its loins for further expansion by establishing subsidiary offices abroad for the sale of films. Producers were now in a strong position to annexe markets previously supplied by European films. Yet before the war Hollywood's pictures were predominant in only three major overseas outlets: Britain, Germany and Australasia.

The disruptions caused in Europe and particularly to French and Italian film production gave Hollywood a golden opportunity to build on its prewar export drive. One of the most important markets to be captured during the war was South America. London lost its place as the centre for world film distribution to New York and American producers were given official assistance when the Creel Committee formed a Films Division which worked closely with companies exporting educational, topical and later fictional feature films. Although the division was wound up in 1919 it foreshadowed subsequent government-industry co-operation.

After the war there were four major threats to Hollywood's supremacy: postwar inflation; the 'Film Europe' movement; the coming of sound and the impact of the Depression. The strength of the dollar in relation to other currencies ironically created a potential trade barrier to exports from America. But no sooner had this advantage disappeared with stabilisation in 1923 than the Americans faced an even greater problem. Spearheaded by the relatively strong German film industry, 'Film Europe' was an attempt to foster European co-operation against American films. But in the end the movement was undermined by internal divisions and a resolute American response.

The US Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce formed a Motion Picture Division to combat, in concert with the Hays Office, European restrictions and to fight protective quotas imposed by governments anxious about the propaganda impact of mass exposure to Hollywood's movies. Although the coming of sound threatened to create a European patent barrier against American talkies, the Depression proved to have a greater adverse impact than the transition to sound. But by 1934 recovery was well under way and the American 'majors' had succeeded in their quest to control nearly every overseas outlet. The only countries that resisted American penetration to a significant degree were the USSR, Germany and Japan.

Although *Exporting Entertainment* is a meticulously researched book, it is a pity the author did

SARAH STREET

As remote as the Middle Ages?

Spanish Cinema under Fascism and Democracy

by Peter Besas

Arden Press/\$31 (\$26 us)

I think this is an uninteresting country and its films, too, are uninteresting, uninteresting for the rest of the world.' This 'uninteresting' country is Spain, and these are the words of one of its most interesting film-makers, Vicente Aranda. Granted that this is a disenchanted view, it is echoed by the facts of international distribution. Last year in Britain, for instance, precisely two Spanish films were released commercially: *Sexual Desires* and *Insatiable Alicia and the Marquis*, both softcore pornography. Excepting Buñuel, as we must, perhaps only three Spanish film-makers are known outside Spain, and then not well: Carlos Saura, José Luis Borau (but only for *Poachers*), and Victor Erice (*Spirit of the Beehive* and *The South*). An older generation may recall Bardem and Berlanga, and may be surprised to learn that they have made between them a score

of films since *La Venganza* and *El Verdugo*.

The invisibility of Spanish cinema owes much to the isolation of Spain. Memories of the Civil War, and forty years of Franco, have induced a collective amnesia about a country good only for package holiday sun and sangria. Now Franco is dead a decade, Spain is in from the cold, and the first democratic government for fifty years has an enlightened cinema policy (subsidies for more than twenty new films in 1985), until recently under the aegis of the director Pilar Miró, who only six years ago faced a military trial and imprisonment for 'insulting' the Guardia Civil in her film *El Crimen de Cuenca*. A new generation of film-makers has emerged, unsurprisingly concerned to shake off the legacy of the past which so preoccupied the Spanish cinema under Franco.

According to Peter Besas, this is a generation for whom 'the whole of the Franco era is already as remote as the Trojan War.' As *Variety's* correspondent in Madrid for some years, Peter Besas has been well placed to observe Spain's troubled transition from dictatorship to democracy and Spanish cinema's reflection of those events. His book is the first full-length account of Spanish cinema in English (another is forthcoming), and welcome on that count alone. As he says, any history of a national cinema is also an account of a social and political reality. But Spain is a problem. In a country which for almost half a century (half the cinema's history) was dominated by a single political reality, cinema existed in the margins: only rarely, though often at great cost, did Spanish films attempt to deny the country's official version of itself. In consequence, there is no real tradition of film-making, and a synoptic view of Spanish cinema history is in effect a contradiction in terms.

Besas does not really face this question, and his unproblematically chronological narrative is something of a patchwork of facts, anecdote and reported opinion. A breathless rush through the pre-Franco years (and a serious underestimation of the Filmófono company and Buñuel's important role in it, which is relegated to a footnote), and within thirty pages we have reached the 1950s, *Surcos* and the 'neo-realist' breakthrough, Bardem and Berlanga. An entertaining, if dubiously relevant, interlude on the Bronston blockbusters takes us into the 60s and the beginnings of change. The book's method also changes, as Besas bolsters his narrative with interviews with a score of film-makers. These comments are often revealing, and more often revealing of the film-makers than of the films they

made. They are also taken at face value. Carlos Saura, for instance, denies a political intention in his films and rejects their political interpretation. The book's jacket quotes Saura's producer, Elias Querejeta, to somewhat different effect; and if the bombing of a Barcelona cinema showing *La Prima Angélica* was not a political response to a political film, then Francoism was a fairy story.

Interpretative analysis is at a premium in Peter Besas' book. When he does venture comment ('Saura plays the memory game ... fiddling with past and present'), he does not aspire beyond *Variety* basic. He gives up on the films of one of the post-Franco cinema's most interesting directors, Manuel Gutiérrez Aragón, finding them 'murky' (*Corazón del Bosque*), 'bewildering' (*Sonámbulos*) and 'perplexing' (*Maravillas*). Of Saura's *Elisa, vida mía*, he says only that it is 'largely a dialogue between a daughter and her father', which is true but inconsequential. And he is cursory on the 'national' cinemas of Catalonia and the Basques. To be fair, Besas does not set out to do more than record a history of Spanish cinema and the views of some of its leading practitioners during the last twenty years. The book's value is

its incidental information, not least (though this is hardly incidental) its references to the absurd proscriptions of censorship, and the often dangerous tightrope which Spanish filmmakers have had to walk to circumvent them.

There are many questions to ask. What difference, for instance, has democracy made? Besas says that after fifty years 'Spaniards seem finally to have shaken off the onus of their politicised past and are questing for new subjects.' Bardem, however, sees only minor modifications, and no evidence of 'that whole, liberating, revolutionary, progressive ferment that existed in the Spanish intellectual world at the time of the Republic'—a view echoed, from a different perspective, by both Aranda and Gutiérrez Aragón. Today's audiences in Spain, Besas concludes, would find films like *Poachers*, *Cria Cuervos* and *Spirit of the Beehive* 'as remote and meaningless ... as the Middle Ages or the Spanish Inquisition.' The onus of history is surely not that easily shaken off. As recently as 1984, a cinema in Granada which was showing *El Caso Almería*, about the trial for murder of three Civil Guards, was burnt down.

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Who goes?

SIR,—I should like to suggest that, although many of the conclusions reached by the survey, 'Who Goes to the Cinema?' (SIGHT AND SOUND, Spring 1986) were most interesting, one at least seemed to be rather ingenuous. Comparing the cost of cinema-going with video hire, the authors said that the former usually cost between £2 and £2.50 and the latter about £1. They concluded that the cost of going to the cinema was only more expensive because people frequently had a meal or a drink as well.

Even if this is true, and it can only be true in some cases, the difference in cost between cinema-going and video hire is much greater than the figures would suggest, since the cinema ticket costs £2 or more *per person*, while the video is more often than not going to entertain a couple, a family or even a group of friends.

For those of us who live a dozen miles or so from a cinema, the real cost of an outing even without the meal or drinks, is likely to be around £15 for an average family—very different from the £1.50 or so we have to pay to hire a video film, though of course logic demands that the cost of the machine should also be taken into account.

Yours faithfully,
M. P. O. VOIGT
Ringmer
East Sussex

Apartheid

SIR,—In view of the fact that any Equity member who might be associated with South Africa is immediately guilty of supporting the apartheid system (shades of McCarthyism), you are unlikely to publish this letter—you would be tagged with the same label, if one follows that particular train of logical reasoning. However, whatever you might do with this letter, I need to howl in the wastelands of bannings and sanctions that Equity members are now cultivating.

It has been bad enough that BBC and other British productions have not been shown on South African television for many years, but now, it seems, all British films with which Equity members are associated will be banned from showing in this country. It is, I think, ironic that this should coincide with the fact that more and more cinemas here are now open to all races; for example, in the area in which I live (Durban and environs) there are twenty-five cinemas, and they are completely open to all races. Theatres and the venues for the Durban Film Festival have been open for years.

Is Equity to practise apartheid

now that apartheid has been abolished in these cinemas? There are a couple of million people in this country whose ancestral traits stem from the British Isles, and many more millions who speak English as a second language—why is there a compulsive obsession to cut us off from this cultural heritage? It's bad enough here trying to get rid of our own local obsessions without suffering from someone else's.

Why is there a need to withdraw any evidence that Britain can provide creativity and excitement in the visual and performing arts in this country? Come the day the only legacy Britain will leave in South Africa will be Scotch whisky, shots of football hooliganism and Zola Budd, and speeches of Mrs Thatcher: British culture and British arts will be a mythological incident. There is a generation here, of all colours, races and religions, who will not miss the world of British arts and cultural values because they will not have known about it. The gap will have been filled by American, Australian, Canadian and dubbed French and German soap operas. I think that is sad.

Yours faithfully,
MURRAY BAXTER
Umhlanga Rocks
South Africa

Steady, the Buffs

SIR,—A surprise to find *ad hominem* spite addressed at me from your pages (Spring 1986) by the pseudonymous Kockenlocker for daring to berate the eleven authors of *The Cinema Book* in my *Stills* review; is it no longer permitted for anyone to disagree? As I didn't even mention SIGHT AND SOUND in my brief review, his bile seems misplaced. He accuses me of not addressing the subject (in fact, he does not address any of the points raised in my review); he drags up my little quarrel in your pages last year with his predecessor, Heurtebise (as if I wasn't allowed to criticise him, either); and he attacks the editorial board of *Stills* for daring to annoy him. Well, it is a rival publication, I suppose.

The Cinema Book, for the record, runs to 378 pages and has three columns of smallish print to a page. As there is something (usually quite a lot) wrong with almost every paragraph, it was clearly going to be impossible for me to review the book in adequate detail within the 750-word limit imposed by the editors, so I gave a generalised blast against the book and the various horrors it so handily represents instead. It is true, by the way, that I'm not too fond of film theory. In that respect, I am similar to SIGHT AND SOUND, as long time readers will know only too well.

As for being a xenophobe, what

can I say? In making a little quip about Messrs Althusser, Metz, Barthes, Propp and Lévi-Strauss, I was not, as is plain to anyone who has actually read my remarks in their proper context, attacking them for being foreign. I was attacking the tendency of BFI pseuds and bores to drag their names out time and again in the mistaken belief that if they drop these names often enough, they will sound intellectual. Be it noted, by the way, that all five worthies were the subject of a joke made by Gilbert Adair in his article about film criticism in the 50th anniversary edition of SIGHT AND SOUND. He invoked the names of Derrida, Eco, Lacan and Todorov for joke purposes, too, and did Kockenlocker say a single word to criticise him? (That article made it clear, by the way, that Adair's hatred of film theorists was far more intense than any feelings I may have had.)

As Kockenlocker has had the temerity to imply that *Stills* ought to sack me, may I, in turn, recommend to the BFI's Board of Governors that a Night of the Long Knives soon be started at the offices of the Institute's house organ? After all, the avowed aim of the BFI is 'to encourage the art of the cinema', which is not done by printing petty character assassinations, or by promoting the arrogance of bad writers, or by boring the public silly with pretentious rubbish such as *The Cinema Book*. I have, I should add, been much heartened by the very considerable support offered me in recent times by the many hard-working friends at the BFI who are as scandalised by the nonsense put out in the Institute's publications as I am.

Yours faithfully,
PETER RICHARDS
Bridgend
Mid-Glamorganshire

SIR,—I am writing in defence of my fellow Film Buff of the Year, Peter Richards, whose review of *The Cinema Book* was denigrated by Kockenlocker. Three points come to mind. First, it is clear from its review in the same issue of SIGHT AND SOUND that *The Cinema Book* is underpinned by the same left-wing and often incomprehensible—at least to me—theoretical structure that has marred many of the BFI's recent publications, which compare unfavourably with the *Cinema One* series of a few years ago. Secondly, while Kockenlocker acknowledges Mr Richards' right to an opinion, he suggests that it should be denied expression. To request Mr Richards to moderate his rather acidic turn of phrase is fair comment, but to urge that he be silenced is unacceptable. Finally, one might question

Kockenlocker's motives in his attack and ask whether he genuinely desires to defend film theory, from which Mr Richards' comments will pass like water off the proverbial duck, or is merely eager for an opportunity to settle scores by ridiculing Mr Richards.

Yours faithfully,
JOHN DAWSON
Totton
Hampshire

Available films

SIR,—Jill Forbes in her review of *The Cinema Book* (Spring 1986) compiled by BFI Education laments that the film material available from the BFI to illustrate aspects of film history is so out of date. This is partly an illusion created by the fact that the BFI Education Department's minds and eyes shut tight to what was going on in this field around 1980, and even to what was going on elsewhere inside the BFI, as is evident from their book itself. For two years, the BFI Film & Video Library has had for hire a new and very large package of short films illustrating new ideas about the first twenty years of cinema (though unfortunately not including *The Physician of the Castle*). Altogether a clear case of the left hand not wanting to know what the right hand is doing.

Yours faithfully,
BARRY SALT
London W14

The Nation's Health

SIR,—In your Winter issue Tim Pulleine, in his article about *Mona Lisa*, takes a gratuitous swipe at *The Nation's Health*, which I produced. I do not object to his pontificating, but I think he should get his facts right. It was not a BBC series, but was made by Euston Films for Channel 4, who both deserve our thanks for tackling this important subject.

Yours faithfully,
IRVING TITTELBAUM
London NW8

Marquez

SIR,—An error subbed its way into my FESTRIO review in the Spring issue. To set the record straight, Gabriel Garcia Marquez hails from Colombia, not Brazil.

Yours faithfully,
SHEILA JOHNSTON
London W12

Satyajit Ray

SIR,—In an interesting account of his visit to the Pune Film Institute (SIGHT AND SOUND, Summer 1985), Andrew Robinson quoted me as saying that I suggested that Satyajit Ray 'ignores his audience'. I am afraid he seems to have got me completely wrong. We were discussing

Indian cinema in general and when we came around to Satyajit Ray, I said that many critics have found fault with him for ignoring contemporary problems and choosing 'safe' subjects. I went on to add that though 'I am personally committed to using cinema as a potent medium for social comment and heightening awareness of audiences to contemporary problems, one cannot find fault with Satyajit Ray for not subscribing to this view.'

Yours faithfully,
N. V. K. MURTHY

Chief Executive, Nehru Centre
Bombay

ANDREW ROBINSON writes: All one can usefully reply to this is 'look at the evidence'. In what sense can *Days and Nights in the Forest*, *The Adversary*, *Company Ltd*, *The Middle Man*, *Pikoo* and *Sadgati* in particular, and *Kanchenjunga*, *The Big City*, *Mahapurush* and *Nayak* to a lesser extent, be said *not* to make a social comment and heighten awareness of audiences? The question is: what is a social com-

ment and, which audience? My impression from meeting Mr Murthy was that, perhaps not being a Bengali himself, he was not fully aware of how much real interest Ray's films generate in Calcutta audiences.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

PETER GREENAWAY's new film is to be *The Belly of an Architect*, backed by British Screen . . . EDWARD ROGERSON is a freelance writer currently researching the economic reconstruction of post-war Poland . . . KAREN ROSENBERG is a fellow of the Russian Research Center at Harvard and has written on films and books for *The Boston Globe*, *The Nation*, *New Society* and *The Village Voice* . . . ALAN STANBROOK is an assistant editor of the *Economist* . . . TOMASZ WARCHOL worked from 1976 to 1981 as an interpreter at the annual Gdansk Festival; he now teaches Film and Literature at Georgia Southern College . . . SIMON WORRALL recently spent a year teaching in China.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ARTIFICIAL EYE for *L'Effrontée*, *A Love in Germany*, *Rough Treatment*.
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CINEGATE for *The Constant Factor*, *Provincial Actors*, *Top Dog*.
COLUMBIA-EMI-WARNER for *Fool for Love*, *After Hours*.
ELECTRIC PICTURES for *Vagabonde*.
PALACE PICTURES for *Absolute Beginners*.
RANK FILM DISTRIBUTORS for *Target*.
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ON NOW

● LOVE LETTERS

(ICA)

Twenty-two-year-old classical disc jockey Jamie Lee Curtis discovers a cache of letters written to her recently deceased mother by the love of her life. While trying to understand her mother's experience, she is drawn into an unsteady relationship with urbane, older, married photographer James Keach. Produced by Roger Corman, directed by Amy Jones (*The Slumber Party Massacre*) and commercially based on the opportunities it affords Ms Curtis to bare her handsome chest, *Love Letters* is less like a low-budget American film than an Australian art movie. An unusual romance, far more satisfying and clear-headed than Hollywood's male-centred love tangles, and blessed with a coolly Californian sense of humour. (Bud Cort, Amy Madigan, Matt Clark.)

● STATIC

(Blue Dolphin)

Ernie (Keith Gordon), fired from his job in an artefacts factory for swiping defective messiahs from the conveyor belt, throws himself into his work as an inventor, with the express aim of devising a machine 'to make people happy, not sad.' The people of his small Arizona town take bets on whether or not Ernie is crazy, and all is revealed when he assembles his close friends for the unveiling of the marvel of science. *Static*, a first feature by Mark Romanek, is one of the few genuinely uncategorisable films to come out of America in the 80s. It's also a light comedy that turns unexpectedly and successfully straight, and a pointed dissection of the need to dream and the problems of being a modern saint. Unusual, assured, insidiously moving. (Amanda Plummer.)

● ZINA

(Virgin)

Brechtian is not the word to apply to Ken McMullen's remarkable film, but it is difficult to think of anything since Brecht's *Galileo* which has achieved such empathy with historical figures and such intellectual grip on historical events. *Zina* never attempts to distance the spectator from the facts of the case, which begin, prior to the account of the Russian Revolution and Trotsky's exile, with a brief litany on the tendency of revolutions to sacrifice their most original thinkers to their ideologies. Thereafter, the account of Trotsky on the Turkish island of Prinkipo, composing his history of events from which he has been excluded, or dancing to the alien rhythms of jazz while speculating on their relation to the industrial age, is intercut with scenes of his daughter Zina in Berlin, talking about her exclusion from her father's life to a psychoanalyst. Through her

own displacement, she senses the terrible consequences of her father's displacement from history. *Zina* may be the first masterpiece of a new genre which has attempted to psychoanalyse history and to 'historicise' individual psychodrama. (Domiziana Giordano, Ian McKellen, Philip Madoc.)

BILLY THE KID AND THE GREEN BAIZE VAMPIRE

(ITC)

A weird, not to say downright perverse, British musical. The plot of *The Hustler* is replayed in *Metropolis*-style expressionist vaults, as cocky young Cockney gunslinger Phil Daniels takes on cloaked-and-fanged Yorkshire bloodsucker Alun Armstrong. (Director, Alan Clarke.)

BLACK MOON RISING

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Car theft magnate Robert Vaughn steals the streamlined Black Moon prototype with the aid of Bacall lookalike Linda Hamilton, and craggy anti-hero Tommy Lee Jones has to retrieve a vital MacGuffin hidden inside it. Pleasantly old-fashioned, with a John Carpenter script from his *Assault on Precinct 13* period, efficiently directed by Harley Cokliss.

CLUE

(UIP)

Miss Scarlet, Colonel Mustard, Professor Plum and the others assemble in an old dark house at the height of the McCarthy era, and a procession of victims troops past in this sub-*Murder by Death* skit on *Ten Little Niggers*. In a large, frantically gugging cast, only Lesley Ann Warren and a Singing Telegram Girl make much of an impression. (Tim Curry, Madeline Kahn, Eileen Brennan; director, Jonathan Lynn.)

DOWN AND OUT IN BEVERLY HILLS

(Disney)

Crass remake of *Boudu Sauvé des Eaux*, set in a cliché California where folks who have everything turn to gurus and pet psychiatrists for what ails them. Dispiritingly, Renoir's joyously subversive tramp now learns to toe the line of material values. (Nick Nolte, Bette Midler, Richard Dreyfuss; director, Paul Mazursky.)

ENEMY MINE

(Fox)

Earthman Dennis Quaid and alien Lou Gossett are marooned together on an inhospitable planet during a space war. Half *Robinson Crusoe on Mars*, half *Hell in the Pacific*, and wholly nothing in particular. (Director, Wolfgang Petersen.)

HANNAH AND HER SISTERS

(Rank)

After Woody Allen's dazzling pirouettes on the head of a single joke in *Zelig* and *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, this is a loosely knit canvas of Manhattan interiors and exteriors. Allen is the ex-husband of Mia Farrow who is married to Michael Caine who lusts after Barbara Hershey who

lives with Max von Sydow... *La Ronde* as shaggy-dog comedy. (Dianne Wiest, Maureen O'Sullivan.)

HE DIED WITH HIS EYES OPEN

(Cannon)

Marvellous performance from Michel Serrault as a quizzical cop investigating a murder and—abetted by Charlotte Rampling's voraciously enigmatic *femme fatale*—undergoing a transference of innocence with the victim. Jacques Deray is no Chabrol, but directs capably enough.

JAGGED EDGE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Courtroom thriller with Jeff Bridges on trial for the murder of his rich wife and Glenn Close as the defence attorney who predictably becomes emotionally involved with her client. Tension smartly maintained for three-quarters of the way, but the denouement lacks the requisite surprise. (Director, Richard Marquand.)

THE LEGEND OF BILLIE JEAN

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Teenage girl cheated out of a debt by two-faced businessman becomes Texan outlaw heroine in a junior variant on *The Sugarland Express* (directed by one of that film's co-writers, Matthew Robbins). Potentially over-familiar material is given point and vigour by brisk, confident handling. (Helen Slater, Keith Gordon.)

MAXIE

(Rank)

Topper-like comedy about a silent movie starlet, cut off in her prime, who returns for a ghostly second bite at the glorious career that eluded her. A travesty of Jack Finney's delightful novel *Marion's Wall*, though it picks up at the end. (Glenn Close, Mandy Patinkin, Ruth Gordon; director, Paul Aaron.)

MIXED BLOOD

(Mainline)

The everyday story of a band of underage Brazilian dope dealers and their Carmen Miranda/Morticia Addams bloody mama in New York's Alphabet City, couched somewhere between sitcom and on-the-streets splatter. The nearest thing yet in the Paul Morrissey oeuvre to real trash rather than knowing pastiche. (Marilyn Perra, Richard Ulacia.)

MURPHY'S ROMANCE

(Columbia-EMI-Warner)

Murphy (James Garner) is a small-town pharmacist, philosopher and philanthropist, who takes under his wing but not, until the last shot, into bed struggling single parent Sally Field. An essay in 'grown-up' romance, pointedly written by Irving Ravetch and Harriet Frank Jnr, but fuzzily directed by Martin Ritt. (Brian Kerwin.)

NINE ½ WEEKS

(Palace)

A would-be 'Last Tango in New York' proves only to be a disco dance to nowhere. With *Flashdance*-style direction from Adrian Lyne, the

enigmatically 'frank' liaison between yuppies Mickey Rourke and Kim Basinger follows a downward spiral from the pointless to the sentimental.

SHADEY

(Mainline)

Director Philip Saville, writer Snoo Wilson and star Antony Sher collaborate on a would-be surrealist comedy in which Sher wants to cash in on his psychic abilities to finance a sex change. Patrick Macnee has his ear cut off, Katharine Helmond eats coal, Leslie Ash works out in leotards.

SID AND NANCY

(Palace)

An attempt to romanticise Sid Vicious and Nancy Spungen, which is hardly the treatment they would have wanted for their defiantly squalid pogo with love and death. Relentlessly whingeing performances and a lengthy slide into drugs, degradation and death make this a solemnly off-putting moral tract. (Gary Oldman, Chloe Webb; director, Alex Cox.)

STREETWALKIN'

(ICA Projects)

'Vice girls' exploitation movie from the Roger Corman stable, in which director Joan Freeman's documentary concerns and stray feminist insights lose out to pumped-up melodrama and violence. Dale Midkiff's performance as a vengeful pimp is a collector's item of Method-style mannerism. (Melissa Leo, Randall Batinkoff.)

TO LIVE AND DIE IN L.A.

(UIP)

William Friedkin back in *French Connection* territory with the tale of a Secret Service agent's stop-at-nothing pursuit of a counterfeiter. The locale, though, is different: West Coast glitz rather than East Coast grit, which means that the images are glowingly fetishistic while the story is batteringly dead-ended. (William L. Petersen, Willem Dafoe.)

THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL

(Mainline)

This slow, theatrical anecdote about a doddery Southern matron's sentimental journey to her old homestead unsurprisingly proves to have its own roots in a 1953 television play. Geraldine Page fires off an Oscar-winning battery of thespian effects, though the real acting honours belong to a touching cameo by Rebecca De Mornay. (John Heard; director, Peter Masterson.)

YOUNG SHERLOCK HOLMES AND THE PYRAMID OF FEAR

(UIP)

Despite the obligatory rooting in the Conan Doyle canon, this Amblin production is rather closer in spirit to *Jennings and Darbyshire in the Temple of Doom*. Nevertheless, there are some wonderful special effects hallucinations, a satisfyingly lunatic plot about ancient Egyptian cults in Wapping, and some accomplished sneering from Anthony Higgins as the young Professor Moriarty. (Nicholas Rowe, Alan Cox, Sophie Ward; director, Barry Levinson.)

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